

BEAUTIFUL MISS MENTON.

THE MENTONS.

WAS IT A CRIME?

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THE MENTONS.

WAS IT A CRIME?

CHAPTER I.

OLD ENEMIES MEET.

"What a strange old gentleman your father is, Miss Menton," said Mrs. Mittens.

Mrs. Mittens is one of those women who look to be anywhere between thirty and fifty. Her eyes are faded; so are her cheeks, though she has found a means of partly disguising the hard wrinkles which have made eccentric zig-zag lines through them. When she speaks it is apologetically; when she laughs it is hysterically, and when she is silent it pains one to look at her.

She had seen old Mr. Menton on several occasions—caught furtive glimpses of him as he had passed a door, or slipped silently up the stairway. But she had never heard Miss Menton speak of him; and this had set Mrs. Mittens to thinking.

There was one quality which this washed-out little widow possessed in all its pristine vigor — she was as inquisitive as she had been twenty years before; and the peculiar fact that Miss Menton's father never joined in the conversations of his daughter's guests — never even gave his presence to the nightly assemblages in his own house, convinced Mrs. Mittens that there was some secret reason for his mysterious conduct. She had been eagerly awaiting an opportunity to apply the inquisitorial pump to Miss Menton.

It offered itself in this way: The old gentleman, still vigorous under the weight of sixty years, with eyes like a hawk's, which glittered under a fringe of shaggy gray brows, had, a moment prior to Mrs. Mittens' question, entered the dining-room. After recognizing its half dozen occupants with a dignified bow, he had requested his daughter to come to his study before she retired. That was all. He had gone out as he had entered, and his footsteps soon died away as he ascended the stairs leading to his study.

"Strange! How, strange, Mrs. Mittens? I do not understand you."

Miss Menton spoke with an icy deliberation which chilled little Mrs. Mittens to the marrow.

She stared at Miss Menton helplessly for a moment, and then gathered her wits sufficiently to make answer that she had merely meant to remark "that Mr. Menton didn't seem to like society."

The beautiful woman who had caused Mrs. Mittens' discomfiture thawed a little. Throwing back her head she said, with a patronizing smile:

"Father is devoted to his studies. He has but little time for society. But I'm sure he would feel hurt if he knew *you* thought him unsocial."

This sugared sarcasm was wholly lost upon Mrs. Mittens. She was glad to escape so easily, and she suppressed herself for the remainder of the evening.

Mr. Lawrence Montague, a stage-struck young man who had become an actor, but who had never been able to convince even the critics that he knew anything about his art — he was really not a bad fellow, off the stage — had just asked the fair hostess if she did not think that realism in art was robbing the stage of its romance, when a servant brought in a card. Miss Menton looked at it.

"Show them up," she said.

"Mr. Wheeler and a friend," she added, turning to her guests. "I wonder who the friend is? I beg your pardon, Mr. Montague; what did you say about realism?"

"I said," repeated the actor, impressively, "that realism is crowding ——"

"Ah! here's Mr. Wheeler," said Col. McPhister, who had been half-dozing in an easy chair in the corner; and poor Mr. Montague did not get the sympathy which his romantic nature and his idealized views of the dramatic art craved.

None of the company thought it unusual that Wheeler should bring a friend to a house where he himself was merely a visitor, without the formality of first asking permission of the hostess. There was nothing conventional about the Mentons. One did about as one pleased at their house.

Mr. Henry Wheeler, artist and magazine scribbler, a constant caller at the Mentons, entered, accompanied by his friend.

"My old chum, Mr. Denman," said he, presenting his companion to Miss Menton.

Wheeler's friend had entered the doorway as self-possessed as an indifferent man of the world could be. But when he raised his eyes to recognize the introduction, he changed color perceptibly; and Miss Menton turned pale. She stared at the man before her as if in doubt whether to take the hand he had extended. His embarrassment was too pain-

ful to witness. Finally Miss Menton said with much sweetness and grace:

"Mr. Denman is welcome—as all of Mr. Wheeler's friends are;" and she at once turned her attention to her guests, entertaining them with a rare tact which had made her famous.

But Paul Denman did not recover his equanimity so readily. He sat pale and silent throughout the evening. His one or two attempts to appear at ease were awkward failures. Wheeler, who had witnessed with surprise the embarrassment which the meeting between his friend and Miss Menton had caused both, watched him as closely as he could without attracting the attention of the others, and tried to conceive a satisfactory explanation.

It was with a feeling of infinite relief that Denman saw him rise and say good night to Miss Menton, and he smiled for the first time during his brief stay in the Menton house when the woman, the sudden meeting with whom had so visibly affected him, held out her hand and very frankly and cordially bade him repeat his visit soon.

Paul Denman was not a man whose appearance invited confidence, though it was not altogether unprepossessing. He was tall, well built, with good features, and an easy, graceful carriage. But there

was a something about him that repelled one. A physiognomist would have said that his eyes were deceitful, his mouth cruel and sensual. Whatever it was in his nature that told one he was not a man to trust, readers of human nature were not slow to discover its presence. Children were afraid of him, and good women avoided him. And yet he was popular, in a way, with men. He was a brilliant conversationalist, and delightfully entertaining as a *raconteur*. He had been absent from New York for eight years — since the death of his father, who had left him a snug patrimony which he might by industry have enlarged into a magnificent fortune, but which he had chosen to fritter away in the fleeting enjoyments of a fast life.

When Wheeler met him by accident that morning he had not been two hours ashore from the Etruria, which had brought him back to his native land. They had been chums at college, though there had never been much sympathy between them, and Wheeler had not hesitated to inquire if he had come back to America to go to work for a living.

"Not quite so bad as that," Denman had replied, "but devilish close to it. By economy"— and he laughed derisively to show his contempt for the

word — "I suppose I can scrub along for a couple of years longer as a gentleman."

Wheeler had invited him to be his guest until he should decide whether he would remain in New York, or go to San Francisco to visit a sister who resided there, and Denman had accepted. Wheeler was one of the few persons whom Denman really liked — or thought he liked.

"One would not have much trouble in guessing that the occupant of these rooms is an artist," said Denman, as he lit his cigar, and sank comfortably into a large chair and gazed lazily about him, upon their return from the Mentons. He seemed to have forgotten all about the unpleasant episode of an hour before.

Wheeler had three rooms. The two larger ones were connected by folding doors, which were always open. A small apartment, adjoining the real parlor —which Wheeler used as a studio, in which he painted passable pictures and wrote clever sketches and *critiques* — was the artist's bedroom. They were seated in the studio. The walls were decorated with all sorts of odd conceits. There were studies in crayon, water color and oil, half-finished pictures, a few really good paintings — by other artists — and a dozen or more rare engravings and

etchings. A collection of old swords, lances, daggers and pistols, with a shield in the center, hung upon the wall, arranged with artistic effect. On the mantel beneath there were two very delicate statuettes, a clock, and half a dozen smaller objects. An easel stood in one corner of the studio, on which there was a stretched canvas with a blue sky background painted across the top, and a few dim outlines scratched on the lower half. The front room Wheeler called his chamber of state. An old-fashioned bedstead, high and Puritanical in its severity, stood in one corner. The half dozen chairs which were scattered about were old style and unique. Wheeler had succeeded admirably in producing an antique effect of the *tout ensemble.*

The artist was not in his usual cheerful mood. His thoughts reverted to the meeting between Miss Menton and Denman. Again and again he tried to solve the mystery of that strange expression in Miss Menton's eyes, the sudden pallor of her face, and the embarrassment of Denman. While his friend was admiring the general arrangement of the rooms and their furnishings, Wheeler arose and walked to the fire-place; looked thoughtfully into its vacant blackness, and then suddenly turned to Denman and asked earnestly:

"What is there between you and Miss Menton?"

A shade of annoyance crossed his friend's face. He moved uneasily in his chair.

"Nothing," he answered, evasively.

"But you have met her before?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In Paris."

"When?"

"Five years ago."

"Were you intimately acquainted with her?"

"No."

"It was not a love affair then?" with a nervous attempt at a laugh.

"No."

Wheeler looked relieved. Denman arose and walked to the window.

"Do you get a good light for your work here?" he asked.

"Good enough," answered Wheeler, absently. "But tell me," he added, impulsively, "why should your meeting with Miss Menton have caused you so much embarrassment?"

Denman frowned. "See here, old man," said he, turning from the window and looking his companion square in the face, "it can do you no good to

know anything about why I was for the moment upset to find myself face to face with Miss Menton. If you had told me the name of the woman whom I was to meet, I would not have gone with you. However, I am surprised that she recognized me. We were never even friends. Let that satisfy you for the present. Some day I may tell you the whole story — though it would probably put you to sleep," and Denman yawned as if the mere thought of it were soporific.

To Wheeler there was something exasperating in Denman's manner. He felt, too, that his friend was concealing something from him; but he merely said:

"Very well; as you please. Of course it's no affair of mine."

Wheeler tried to say this as if he really did not care to know the history of the "affair;" but he soon relapsed into a moody silence. Denman looked at his friend furtively, and, without changing his expression, picked up a comic paper which was lying upon the table and began to turn its leaves listlessly. He only half guessed the reason of Wheeler's inquisitiveness. He thought it was merely idle curiosity. It never entered his head that Wheeler was in love with Miss Menton, and Wheeler himself

would not have admitted it, for the reason that he did not know it. And in truth he was not in love with her, though with an artist's eye he had admired the lines of her superb figure; and the peculiar dreaminess of her red-brown eyes had impressed him strangely. But an infatuation for the beautiful Miss Menton had been growing within him none the less strong because of his unconsciousness of it. It never occurred to him that he might one day find it difficult to get out of the meshes into which he had voluntarily plunged.

The meeting between Denman and Miss Menton, the former's refusal to explain the cause of the palpable uneasiness of both attending it; Denman's evident desire to conceal from him the history of their acquaintance in Paris, and Miss Menton's sudden change from coldness to warmth, as she invited Denman to repeat his visit — all this irritated Wheeler, and he lashed himself into a silent passion of jealousy. He made himself believe that he was simply annoyed because Denman had not given him his full confidence, to which he convinced himself he was entitled through the fact that he had been the cause of their meeting.

Henry Wheeler was an impulsive, warm-hearted fellow of thirty-two; as susceptible to kindness as

to sunshine; moody at times, always illusionary, and, though of a cheerful, open disposition, a victim to presentiments. He lacked poise. If the day on which he was about to seek a purchaser for his last painting or *critique* were cloudy, he regarded it as an omen of failure. If he were contemplating an undertaking, the success of which seemed doubtful, he would flip a coin in the air. If it fell "tails" when he had mentally called "heads," he would try the charm again, and if with the same result, he would either turn from his purpose in morbid discouragement or go about it weighed down by the conviction that he would fail. His moral nature was a weathercock, which swung more easily to the right than to the wrong, but which any wind, good or bad, could move, were it strong enough.

The physical man was pronounced. He stood six feet in his stockings, and was of symmetrical proportions. A pair of hazel eyes looked out at you from under a high brow, almost abnormally developed at the sides, where the hair grew away from the temples. A phrenologist would have said that the organs of ideality and sublimity were developed so greatly in excess of the other organs as to make it impossible for Henry Wheeler to view the affairs of every-day life from a practical standpoint.

It is very rarely that a man of his temperament attains perfect physical development; and Wheeler would not have attained it but for his great love of the fields and the water. He would stroll for hours across the rolling farms on the Hudson, happy to be alone with the birds and flowers; and he found scarcely less delight in sailing and rowing. He was a paradox in more ways than in his mental and physical temperament. Though possessed of great spirituality, yet he was at times grossly material; though tender hearted as a woman and generous in his instincts, yet he could be guilty of the most atrocious and cruel selfishness. He never studied himself, nor attempted to solve the lack of harmony in his nature.

A yawn from Denman aroused Wheeler from his feverish musings. He chided himself for having acted so ungraciously to a guest, and with as much cheerfulness of countenance as he could assume, he showed Denman to his room, and bade him good night.

Denman's eyes glittered with coarse desire as he sat upon the edge of the bed, deep in thought. He arose, disrobed, and as he turned out the gas muttered to himself:

"I wonder if it would be as dangerous to cultivate the Mentons in New York as it was in Paris."

CHAPTER II.

AMID RETORTS AND FURNACES.

Little Mrs. Mittens told the truth when she said that Mr. Menton was "a strange old gentleman," and she might have added that Miss Menton was a strange young lady. Between this odd pair there existed a relation that was utterly devoid of the affection natural between father and daughter. They seemed to be nothing more than good friends, who understood each other's idosyncrasies, and tolerated them.

The old man spent most of his time in the study. It was in the roof. No one but Menton and his daughter had ever set foot within the threshold since the old man had completed the arrangement of his retorts, furnaces, surgical instruments, chemicals, and books. The servants were almost afraid to pass the door. You could not have hired the chambermaid to enter this terrible apartment — indeed, the strange ways of the Mentons, with the added mystery of the old man's laboratory, made it almost impossible for them to keep a servant longer than a

month. The servants liked Miss Menton well enough, for she permitted them to do about as they pleased, and seemed to be an ordinary mortal like themselves. But the old man was a constant source of terror to them. Even their lively imaginations could not picture the inside of his laboratory sufficiently horrible. They were confident that he was in league with the devil; and the cook, who had never seen him, but who had been filled with fear and wonder by the tales the chambermaid and dining-room girl had told her touching the old man's peculiarities — very much exaggerated, of course, and colored as highly as the imaginations of these simple women could paint them — would not have been at all surprised if this magician in the attic should take it into his head to transport the house, servants and all, to the infernal regions by one wave of the wand which she felt assured was always convenient to his hand. Nothing but her laziness kept her in the Menton kitchen. She was opposed to early rising; and the Mentons did not breakfast till ten.

There was one thing which the servants did not attempt to explain; and that was, what Mr. Menton did with so many dogs. Nearly every week a fresh dog was coaxed or driven into the old gentleman's

study. Menton would go out for a walk and come back with a dog. When once the door of the "study" had closed upon the canine the night knew his howl no more. Thus old Menton's mystery was always associated with dogs, and the cook was of the opinion that he ate them.

Lucius Menton was a true *savant*. He was unknown to the world, though one or two of his friends were members of the French Academy; but he had never written anything for the scientific magazines, and knew only three scientific men in New York; one, a doctor whose countenance was so evil that no Christian would have him at his bedside; the second, a chemist who was employed by one of the large chemical manufacturing firms of New York; and the third, a specialist in physiology —a man who would have won a name in the world had he not made the mistake of experimenting on himself in order that he might fully appreciate the condition of mental exaltation produced by opiates. This man eked out a precarious existence by assisting as a proof reader in a house which published medical works.

These men were not in Menton's confidence. O, No! He treated them with consideration because they were at times useful to him; but not one of



IN A VERY UN-PARISIAN WAY I KNOCKED HIM DOWN.

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them had ever been in his study, and he was always careful that they should not find the slightest indication to lead them to the secret of his investigations. He had an income which made it possible for him to live in ease without a thought of to-morrow or time. He was of French blood, and, as a fitting conclusion to the dissipations of his youth, had married a French ballet dancer, who had died five years after giving birth to a beautiful girl whom Menton had always regarded very much as he would the child of a friend, which he was in honor bound to rear. He had named her Helene. She had traveled all over the world with him, and had grown to have some interest in her father's scientific studies, though she spent only as much time in his company as pleased her; and he never bothered himself to inquire how she occupied herself when he was busy with his books and experiments.

In fact he did not care. He believed in neither religion nor ethics, and though not coarse in his nature, was totally devoid of moral refinement. With all this, he was kind to the poor, cultured, and apparently a gentleman of the old school. Such were Lucius Menton's surroundings when we find him devoting the ripe strength of his intellect to the investigation of a theory which, if proved,

would startle the physiological world. It was to this end that he was continually luring stray dogs to his laboratory, where, by the aid of vivisection, he might demonstrate the error of the established theory of the circulation of the blood. He fondly hoped to some day burst upon the scientific world like a comet, and in a blaze of glory show the old fogies that the lungs, not the heart, are the organs which pump the life blood through the arteries of the body.

He was seated at his desk, writing rapidly, his eyes aglow with enthusiasm when his daughter entered. Her guests had departed. She had come at her father's request — and with a purpose of her own.

"I'm nearing the end," said the old man, throwing down his pen, and clenching his fists through nervous excitement; "my theory is right and it will be accepted — *it must* be accepted!"

Miss Menton had heard this before. It did not elate her; indeed, if she had fully believed her father had really accomplished his great undertaking she was not in a mood to rejoice with him.

"I hope so," she said indifferently, and then with a sudden burst of feeling which seemed to intensify the peculiar redness of her eyes, and in a

voice trembling with only half suppressed passion, she exclaimed:

"I have found him!"

"Who?" and Menton frowned. He did not like to have his great discovery disposed of so flippantly for any "he."

"Denman!"

"Denman!" repeated the old man in surprise. "Well, what do you propose to do with him now that you have found him?" he continued coolly after a pause. He picked up his pen and turned to his writing

Miss Menton was silent. The quiet of the laboratory, heavy with the stale fumes of acids and gases, was broken only by the scratching of Menton's pen, and the rustle of the silk which covered Miss Menton's heaving bosom. The fire died out of her eyes. Her lips trembled. She looked vacantly toward the window:

"I don't know," she answered hopelessly.

"Where did you find him?" asked the old man grimly.

"Here."

"What, in New York?"

"In this very house," and the color came back to Miss Menton's cheeks, and her eyes blazed again.

"He did not seek *you?*"

"No. Wheeler brought him. He seemed frightened when he stood face to face with me. He could not have known that he was going to meet me. And I was startled, too; but I recovered myself much quicker than he did."

"I am not surprised at that," and the old man gazed upon his daughter admiringly. "But I suppose you will forget the past, and let him go? It will save trouble and annoyance."

"Forget!" The woman drew up her superb figure to its full height. She looked a very Phædre. "Forget! Never!" she hissed. "Can I forget that it was he who robbed me of the man I loved, of position, wealth, and happiness? Can I forget that but for his act I might to-day be a Countess? No! No."

"But what do you purpose to do?" asked the old man, without a trace of sympathy in his voice. His daughter did not answer. After a moment of thought she said in a strained voice:

"If he is as anxious to make love to me as he was once, I may give him an opportunity."

"What then?"

"Wait and see." With a nervous laugh Miss Menton started toward the door, and after a con-

ventional and meaningless good night, she left the room. The old man was alone with his retorts and bottles. He soliloquized ——: "She'll pay that poor devil principal and interest on the debt she owes him. Of course, he will make a fool of himself over her if she gives him the slightest encouragement — they all do. Well, if she can take her revenge in that way, it's harmless enough But what if the fellow has no heart to break?"

CHAPTER III.

BEAUTIFUL HELENE MENTON.

Helene Menton was more beautiful and fascinating at thirty than she had been at twenty. She was a rare woman — a beautiful animal, and clear and sparkling in her intellectuality. It is doubtful if she could have become a truly good woman under any circumstances. She had inherited the passionate nature of her mother, with its attendant lack of moral balance, together with the selfish, indifferent temperament of her father; and these hereditary traits were as strongly marked as is the color of a child born of negro parents. Such as she was nature had made her. She had no desire to be better; she might have been much worse. She was tall, sinuous, and yet not slender. Her figure contained all the charms which plumpness gives, with the dignity and grace which are almost inseparable from slenderness. There was a magnetism in her presence which sent a thrill through men who were susceptible to physical beauty. Her eyes — which had exerted so strange an influence

over Henry Wheeler, despite the natural aversion he had felt for the woman upon meeting her for first time — were of that odd combination of color which to the student of faces denotes a peculiarly passionate nature and pronounced will power. Had she been born a man, and become a soldier, she would have moved men to great deeds of daring by her personality, and the magnetism of her eyes.

Her position in society was equivocal. In truth, it must be admitted that she did not move in what is called society. She never went out except to the play and the opera, and the only people she knew in New York were those who came to her house. And a queer lot they were; artists, actors, Bohemian writers, one or two retired army officers, and a few women, whose only accomplishments were an ability to talk a great deal, sing a little, and dress decently. These women were not what one would call *comme il faut*, and yet one could not prove that the lives they led were not above reproach. They stood upon that neutral ground which lies between admitted virtue and pronounced wickedness. Miss Menton was head and shoulders above this collection of femininity, intellectually— and morally, too.

She was resigned to existence as she found it;

never craved that society which was beyond her—or if she did her ambition was known to no one but herself—and did not burden her mind with speculations upon what may come after death.

A bad woman — the gentle reader will say. Bad? Yes; but is she responsible for it? Her very individuality was inherited. She can not make herself better than she is. Her surroundings would forbid that, had she the desire. It is not pleasant to draw the picture of a woman who has all the graces of body and mind, and yet who is as empty of holy womanly sentiment as a statue is of feeling. But the duty of the writer is to show you the people in this strange episode of the nineteenth century as they really existed. It would be a more pleasing task to give virtues to all of them, and warm, open natures; but it would not be a true picture. If you can find anything in Miss Menton to admire, cherish it. If you can not, at least remember that she is the child of Lucius Menton, and a French ballet dancer; and be charitable.

CHAPTER IV.

IT WAS HARDLY MURDER.

Denman became a constant visitor at the Mentons. He was there almost nightly, and by the good natured people who gathered there was voted the wittiest and cleverest of Miss Menton's guests.

Wheeler viewed Denman's popularity and the advancement he seemed to be making in Miss Menton's good graces with displeasure. He grew morbid and restless. Once or twice he resolved to remain away from the Menton house and the unhealthful atmosphere which permeated it, and devote himself to honest work with brush and pen. But these resolutions were no sooner made than broken. He felt miserable in that atmosphere; but he was in despair when out of it, especially when his imagination pictured Denman and Miss Menton chatting gaily together.

The peculiarity of Wheeler's passion was that it probably would never have assumed serious proportions if Paul Denman had not come upon the scene, and, by the mystery of his former acquaintance with

Miss Menton, aroused his jealousy, which in turn had increased his infatuation.

He did as other impressionable men had done before him: refused to listen to reason and rushed headlong into a sea of misery with his eyes open. Denman was not long in discovering his friend's unhappy condition. He liked Wheeler, and with a seriousness unusual with him, he asked:

"Tell me frankly: do you really care for that woman?"

Wheeler's face flushed, and he asked hotly: "By what right do you speak of Miss Menton as 'that woman?'"

"Well, call her Miss Menton, if you please. But I see that it is not necessary to repeat my question; you evidently care a great deal for her. I'm sorry for you, my friend."

"I don't want your sympathy," said Wheeler, sulkily; "you seem to be as much in need of condolence as I."

Paul Denman laughed. "Not at all, my dear fellow," he said. "There is not the slightest danger of my heart ever becoming entangled there."

This satisfied Wheeler for a moment. Then he asked: "If you dislike her so much why do you spend so much of your time at her house?"

"She is very pretty," replied Denman, twisting his moustache; "and one can't meet pretty women every day, and clever ones at that."

To hear Miss Menton discussed in this insolent manner was unbearable. "You are trifling with her then," exclaimed Wheeler. At that moment he would have laid down his life to defend the woman whom he did not even thoroughly respect.

Denman looked at him in genuine surprise. "Wheeler," said he, "you really seem to have some faith in Miss Menton. You don't know her. She is not worthy of your confidence—certainly not of your love."

Wheeler rose and paced nervously up and down the room. Denman watched him with much concern. He honestly pitied him. Suddenly Wheeler stopped in front of Denman's chair. His face was very white.

"Denman," he said, his voice tremulous with the intensity of his feelings, "we are friends. Friendship has its obligations. I beg of you to tell me what you know of Miss Menton. Why is she not worthy of my confidence? Why is she not worthy of the love of any man? Explain to me the mystery that lies between you. How came you

to know her in Paris? Tell me all. I have a right to know."

"I would rather not," answered Denman, gravely.

"But you said you would, and I hold you to your promise."

"You are mistaken, Wheeler; I did not promise, for I never intended to tell you. I merely said that perhaps I would tell you. However, you shall hear the story. I have never told it to anyone else, and I now tell it to you in the confidence of friendship. The secret which you so desire to know concerns me more closely than it does Miss Menton. I killed her lover."

"Murdered him!" exclaimed Wheeler, starting to his feet in horror.

"Hear me out," said Denman, motioning with his hand for Wheeler to resume his seat. "I killed him in a duel. It was his life or mine. It would have been mine but for an accident. The circumstances which led up to the duel were these: Five years ago I was in Paris. You have never been in Paris. Multiply the wickedness of New York by ten, and you will only approximate the gilded degeneracy of the French capital. Being young, rich, and with a desire to leave no pleasure

untasted, I plunged into dissipations of every description. The Mentons lived in Paris very much as they live here. It was not difficult to get into their house. I was taken to it by a friend, just as you took me to see Miss Menton here in New York. I saw men playing cards; there was a general air of looseness about the place—at least it seemed so to me. I took it for granted that it was a gaming place, and I had not a doubt but that the beautiful woman who presided over it was the decoy that led men to their ruin. To me, an American, the presumption was natural that this woman was like hundreds of others in Paris. I was wrong in my first supposition. Her house was not a gambling den; and perhaps she was not so bad a woman as I believed. But I did not discover my error until too late. Heated with wine, upon taking my departure, I said something to Miss Menton which she construed as an insult. You should have seen her eyes flash! Nothing daunted, I returned the next evening. I was refused admittance; that is to say, in polite terms, 'Miss Menton was not at home.' This angered me. To be kicked out of such a place made me frantic. I felt sure that I was not culpable. I did not believe that any pure woman could lead the life that woman led. By that

reasoning I excused my action, and I hated her heartily.

"Three nights later I entered a café. Not ten feet from the table at which I had taken a seat, sat Miss Menton and a fine looking fellow—a German Count, as I afterward learned. Still smarting under the humiliation she had put upon me, I boldly and insultingly stared and sneered at the woman. Her companion could not but observe it. He crossed to where I sat and demanded an explanation and an apology. I laughed in his face. He slapped me with his open hand. I retaliated in a very un-Parisian way by knocking him down. Upon regaining his feet he handed me his card, and demanded mine. I gave it to him. As I expected, on the following day I received a challenge. You may be surprised, but the prospect of a duel delighted me. It had been the ambition of my silly youth to fight one, and one of the first things I did on arriving in Paris was to secure a fencing master—you remember how much I liked fencing at college? Well, under this Frenchman's training I became, as I thought, very proficient. The Count's challenge gave me the very opportunity I had been longing for. I accepted it, and much to his surprise, chose rapiers. He had supposed that being an American I would,

of course, choose pistols—they have an idea over there that every American carries a revolver and uses it on the slightest provocation.

"We fought in Belgium. I very soon made two discoveries: first, that fighting a duel with naked swords was quite a different thing from a combat with foils, with the face protected by a mask; and second, that the Count was more than my match. Twice he lunged at me so wickedly that it was with the greatest difficulty I parried his thrust. I acted entirely on the defensive. After we had been on guard for, say three minutes, he began to act as if he intended to finish me at once. He advanced cautiously. I retreated as well as I could, but he continued to approach, disengaging his sword by quick feints. It unnerved me. I thought my time had come. In sheer terror I ducked my head and involuntarily extended my sword arm. It saved my life; for it so happened that at that very instant the Count was preparing to lunge. His blade passed harmlessly over my shoulder; mine penetrated his heart—ran clear through him. He gasped, threw up his arms, and fell dead. I returned to Paris, took the first train for London, and two days later was steaming toward India. I have not been in Paris since."

During the recital of this story, Wheeler had not once removed his eyes from the man who had so coolly and graphically detailed the killing of another.

"I am glad you told me," he said in a constrained voice. "I can not say that I blame you. It was hardly murder. But do you think this Count was Miss Menton's lover — I mean in the French significance?"

"You know as much about that as I do," returned Denman, recovering his old free-and-easy manner. "For my part, I mean to find out. To that end I am a visitor at her house. If he was, why should not I, the victor take his place?"

Wheeler recoiled. "This is horrible," he said. "I should think you would shun rather than seek her. I believe," continued Wheeler, with conviction, "that your opinion of the woman is wrong, and that you will be sorry if you try to prove that it is right."

"What! Haven't I cured you?" exclaimed Denman.

"No; you admit yourself that you do not *know;* that you only surmise."

"Let's drop the subject," said Denman. "No good can come of a further discussion of it."

They did not speak of Miss Menton again until three weeks later.

CHAPTER V.

"WHY NOT MORE THAN FRIENDS?"

Wheeler found Miss Menton alone when he called a few nights after he had become possessed of Denman's secret. He looked into her eyes with a new interest in their beautiful possessor. "A good opportunity to study her," he thought as he took the hand which she charmingly extended as he entered.

"It's not often I have the pleasure of a quiet conversation with you, now," he said.

"Is it really a pleasure?" she asked, gently.

"A very great one," Wheeler replied.

"Then you must come often in the afternoon, when I am always alone. You may be sure the pleasure of our talks will be mutual. But where is Mr. Denman to-night?"

Wheeler's spirits sank. "Oh, he'll drop in later, I suppose," he replied, indifferently. But he could not entirely conceal his annoyance. "Why does she think of him, after what has happened?" he asked himself. "Can it be that Denman's opinion

of her is right?" The thought was misery. He sat silent and morose. The change in his expression and manner did not escape Miss Menton. That it conveyed an intelligence was evident from the softer light that came into her eyes.

"Let us not talk about him," she purred insinuatingly. "I want to tell you of a conversation I had with Professor Ryse — you know the professor, the old gentleman who knows so much about physiology and who comes here to talk with papa sometimes? Of course you do. Well, just before you came, he was telling me of some very wonderful things that have been done recently by the French psychologists, who have been investigating hypnotism. Do you believe in it?"

"Most assuredly," said Wheeler, happy once more.

"What do you think it is; magnetism or something of that sort?"

"No; not exactly, though something like the hypnotic condition may be produced by magnetism. To tell the truth, I don't know much about it — only enough to believe in it."

"It seems to me," said Miss Menton, with a perceptible shudder, "that there must be something supernatural about it."



MINE PENETRATED HIS HEART—RAN CLEAR THROUGH HIM.

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"Don't you believe her; she knows better," said a voice.

They looked up. There stood old Mr. Menton. He laughed. "Don't let me interrupt your learned conversation," said he; "I'm merely looking for the daily papers."

He found them on the floor, near where his daughter was sitting. As he started to leave the room he turned to Wheeler and said jocosely: "Don't let my daughter deceive you. She is not so silly as to believe in the supernatural in anything. She would not be my daughter if she were."

Wheeler smiled, for want of something better to do. Miss Menton followed her father with her eyes as he went out of the door. It was not an affectionate glance that she gave him.

At this moment Col. McPhister and Mr. Montague were announced. The former came in briskly; the latter strode in as if he were making the fifth entrance in the rôle of Hamlet.

"We were talking about hypnotism," said Wheeler, who had a real interest in the subject. "What do you know about it, Colonel? We are sadly in need of enlightenment."

"Never heard of it," grunted the old warrior,

gallantly lifting the hand of the fair hostess to his lips.

"A most entertaining subject," said Montague with a superior air; "one which appeals to all contemplative minds, and one to which I have given much thought."

"If that's the case, I suppose you've exhausted it," barked the Colonel, with rasping sarcasm; "but what's it like, anyway?"

Mr. Montague did not deign to reply. He even turned his back upon the grumpy Colonel.

"It's something like mesmerism," volunteered Wheeler.

"Then it's a damned humbug—if you'll excuse my emphasis," replied the Colonel, promptly.

Miss Menton smiled. His "emphasis" was pardoned. He knew it would be. He had often offended in the same way, and had been forgiven every time.

"Yes," the old fellow continued, "I've seen a good deal of that kind of humbug. It's a good enough thing to write about, and it may interest scientific men to fool away their time over it, but a man's a fool to believe in it, all the same. It's like the mind cure — something for women to talk about

—good enough for infants and idiots, but nonsense for level-headed men."

"The mind cure, as you vulgarly call it," said Mr. Montague, interjecting himself into the conversation with mild dignity, "is one of the transcendental discoveries of our time. It proves that thought is; that matter is not."

"The devil it does," said the Colonel, contemptuously.

Mr. Montague was above noticing the interruption. "You are a metaphysician, are you not, Miss Menton?" he continued.

"I'm afraid my knowledge of metaphysics is not great enough to entitle me to that distinction," smiled Miss Menton.

"Beg pardon, but you do not understand me," explained Montague with a kindly patronizing air that was so ridiculous that Wheeler almost laughed aloud; "I meant to ask if you had not studied the science of curing what is commonly called disease by the influence of the mind?"

"And do you call that metaphysics?" broke in the Colonel, impatiently. "How long does it take to learn it?"

"I mastered it in two weeks," said Mr. Montague, with considerable emphasis; "but, of

course," he added, "I had no part to play in that time."

"Except the part of a fool," said McPhister, *sotto voce*. He went on in a loud, aggressive voice, as if his intelligence had been outraged: "Two weeks, do you say? And you call yourself a metaphysician! Why, my dear sir, it may surprise you, but there are men — men of brains, too — who have studied metaphysics for a lifetime who dare not call themselves metaphysicians. Metaphysicians made in two weeks! Bosh! I am pained to tell you, sir, that your philosophy is even worse than your acting — a damned sight worse, sir," and the Colonel sat down very hard in a very soft chair. The old fellow was disgusted, and he did not conceal it. But if he thought he could hurt Mr. Montague's feelings he was mistaken. That æsthetic representative of the art histrionic had only pity for the vulgar materialism of his military friend. He made no reply.

Wheeler had been very much amused by the passage at words between McPhister and Montague. He admired the old soldier for his blunt nature as much as he disliked Montague for his weak-minded pretentiousness. Turning to Miss Menton, he said, pleasantly:

"If our belligerent friends will permit me, we'll resume our instructive conversation on hypnotism. So you really believe there is something supernatural about it?"

"Papa has given me a reputation for such pronounced materialism that you would not believe me if I were to say yes," replied Miss Menton, elevating her brows.

The Colonel was already dozing; Montague was at the other end of the room making himself believe he was criticizing an etching.

"I would believe anything you might say." Wheeler said this in a low voice — almost a whisper; so low that only the ears for which it was intended heard it.

Miss Menton gave him a glance that made his blood tingle. McPhister was soon sound asleep, and Montague, having sense enough to see that he was *de trop*, took his departure. It was the shortest call he had ever made at the Menton house. When they were alone, save for the sleeping presence of the Colonel, Miss Menton placed her hand confidingly on Wheeler's arm and said:

"Do not think me bold, Mr. Wheeler, but I feel drawn toward you; we shall always be friends, shall we not?"

"Why not more than friends?" he asked, eagerly, taking her hand and holding it in both of his, as he looked tenderly into her eyes.

Miss Menton sighed. "That can never be," she said, with a sad smile; "besides, I could not make you happy. But we may always be friends. I need friends, Mr. Wheeler."

The voice was so soft, so sweet, that Wheeler would have sworn its possessor was as good a woman at heart as ever breathed. He was about to say something foolish when Miss Menton said, prettily:

"I move the previous question; let's go back to hypnotism."

"Anything you like," said Wheeler. "Hypnotize me, if you want to; you already have me under a spell."

Miss Menton rose suddenly and walked over to the mantel. She trembled violently. Could Wheeler have seen the expression on her face he would have been startled by its awfulness. It was that of a person who has conceived an idea that frightens even the mind which has created it. But when Miss Menton returned to her seat her face was calm, and only the strange light that burned in her

eyes indicated her mental excitement; and Wheeler did not notice this.

"I believe I could hypnotize you," said Miss Menton, slowly; "for it seems to me that sympathetic natures have power over one another."

Wheeler was at the point of putting her hand to his lips to prove that the sympathy to which she referred existed, when McPhister awoke with a snort and asked Wheeler to go to lunch with him. The artist was not hungry, and he would have declined the Colonel's invitation had not Miss Menton risen from her chair, prepared to bid them good night, thus indicating that she was not averse to bringing the conversation to an end.

Wheeler left the house in company with the Colonel in a feverish daze. He was not sure whether he was satisfied or not with the result of his visit.

When they had gone Miss Menton began to pace nervously up and down the room. Her face was a study—a combination of fear, doubt and determination. She stopped short in her walk. "I'll try it, anyway," she said. She turned out the lights. A moment later she was alone in her chamber.

CHAPTER VI.

IT WAS A SWELL NIGHT AT THE MENTONS.

Wheeler got on famously with Miss Menton after their psychological interview. He thought he discovered new qualities in her every day. She seemed more thoughtful. In her society he found peace and contentment, and he was quite satisfied to let matters run as they would. He was not in love with her; but the sentiment he entertained was very much like love.

Denman still remained his guest. They had pleasant chats at night before retiring, and Denman's friendship for Wheeler increased. The two weeks prior to the night at the Menton house, which will be described presently, were the most peaceful that Wheeler had enjoyed for years, and Denman seemed to have been refined by his association with the artist. Apparently he had abandoned his campaign on Miss Menton's affections — much to Wheeler's relief. All the good in the man seemed to have suddenly come to the surface. His conversation was not so coarse and flippant as it had been,

and he was less cynical in his criticisms of persons and things. He once actually considered the advisability of opening an office and beginning the practice of law. Wheeler had laughed at him. "You will not do that until the banks return your checks unpaid," he said, and Denman had laughingly admitted that his friend was about right.

It was a swell night at the Mentons. The parlors had not contained so many guests for a year. It was an informal gathering; and its size was due to the coincidence of a great many of Miss Menton's acquaintances having taken it into their heads at the same time to pay her a visit. Professor Ryse was there, with his friend Dr. Grip—who looked like a caricature; Mr. Landis, the chemist; Mrs. Mittens (her first appearance since the sudden congealing Miss Menton had given her some weeks before); Mr. Montague and a friend who *could* act, but who could not do anything else, and who could do that only under the stage manager's coaching; Col. McPhister; Judge Blackwood, a sedate looking man, who, through the invitation of McPhister that night made his first appearance in the Menton circle, and half a dozen other men and women who cut no greater figure in this strange episode than they did in Miss Menton's reception that night; they

were useful simply as a background. Wheeler and Denman dropped in about nine o'clock. They were both in high spirits. The conversation had drifted through one channel into another, and out again into vagueness, until finally it ran against the theme in which the greatest number of those present seemed to be most interested. It was psychology.

Professor Ryse introduced it by referring casually to the wonderful feat in mind reading which a young man had accomplished in Boston.

"This young man," continued the Professor with the air of a man who speaks *ex cathedra*, "succeeded in finding a small scarf pin which had been concealed in a fireplace in a house nearly a mile distant from the room in which he sat, blindfolded, and in the presence of a committee. The person who concealed the pin was also a member of the committee. The mind reader was placed in a carriage. The committee man, who had hidden the pin took a seat beside him. The reins were placed in the mind reader's hands. There was a constant contact between the hands of the mind reader and the person who concealed the pin. After some hesitation the mind reader drove straight to the house where the pin was hidden and found it without difficulty."

"He must have had a confederate," remarked Judge Blackwood.

"No," replied the Professor, "I am quite sure the test was honest. Several members of the committee occupied seats in the carriage with him. There was no opportunity for deception."

"Do you not think it can be explained by muscle reading, and more reasonably than by mind reading?" ventured Mr. Landis. "There are a number of scientific men in Boston who investigated the matter and convinced themselves that it was really muscle reading. It seems to me quite natural that the person who hid the pin, and kept its location constantly in his mind, should have unconsciously directed the young man to the object by muscular pressure on his hand, or by some other indication of that nature. The sympathy between the mind and the muscles is strong, you know."

"I do not put any faith in that theory," said the Professor. "I have not the slightest doubt of the truth of what is called mind reading. Tests have been made by the use of the galvanometer. The mind reader has held one end of a wire, the subject the other. When the galvanometer was applied to the wire there was a perceptible deflection of the needle. To me this proves what I have always

maintained in theory, that thought is what one might call, an electric essence. But I see no reason why one should question the genuineness of mind-reading, when more wonderful psychological phenomena thrust themselves under our eyes every day. The experiments which the French scientists have made in hypotism—and successful experiments, too — indicate that we are as yet infants in our understanding of the subtle qualities of the mind and its power." The Professor was eloquent. It was his favorite theme.

"Is this hypnotic power a special natural gift, or can it be acquired?" asked the Judge, who had become interested in the subject.

"Any one can acquire it, though there are still quacks who profess that it is possessed by but few persons. I was discussing this question at some length with Miss Menton on my last visit," continued the Professor, "and was describing to her a remarkable case which has just been reported from ——."

"Yes," interrupted Miss Menton hastily, but not rudely; "the Professor told me all about this wonderful power, and how easily it can be acquired. I feel that I could exercise it myself with a little

practice," and Miss Menton laughed lightly as she tapped her fingers with her closed fan.

"I haven't the slightest doubt of it," said the Professor. "The only requisite would be a willing subject and the proper conditions. There is nothing mysterious about the power, and the sooner the charlatans are exposed the better. Miss Menton could produce the hypnotic sleep as readily as any one could."

"Let's have an experiment," said the Judge, who believed in improving opportunities as fast as they presented themselves, when they promised instruction.

"Wouldn't that be nice," chimed in Mrs. Mittens; "it reminds me of the time my sister and I sat down at a table at Madame La Grange's and tried to get the spirits to move it."

Professor Ryse looked at the faded little widow with benignant pity.

"Won't *you* try the experiment?" urged the Judge, turning to the Professor.

"I beg you'll excuse me," Ryse answered. "It will be more amusing to let some of the young people try it. The result will be the same, I think."

"I'm willing to try my power," said Miss Menton. Her face was flushed with excitement, and her

eyes blazed with a light that was peculiarly intense. "Who will be my subject?"

"I will," said Denman promptly. He had no faith in Miss Menton's ability to mesmerize him, but he was quite ready to undergo the pleasure of the experiment.

"So will I, Miss Menton," said Wheeler, rising and crossing to where Miss Menton stood; "and my claim is the prior one. Don't you remember I offered myself as a subject once before?"

Miss Menton remembered it only too well; but she only said: "Did you? Well, then you shall be my subject. 'First come, first served,' you know," she added with benignity to Denman. "Your turn will come," and she laughed almost hysterically.

Denman good-naturedly withdrew in favor of Wheeler, and as Miss Menton made preparations for the test, Montague remarked to McPhister, "What a gay mood Miss Menton is in to-night. I have not seen her so lively for a long time," and the Colonel nodded.

The fair hostess placed a chair in the middle of the room, and at her direction Wheeler took his seat in it with mock gravity. He was quite willing to

be hypnotized, but like Denman, he doubted Miss Menton's ability to do it.

"Now I must have some small, bright object," said she, assuming the air of the platform experimenter in mesmerism; "something round and bright."

"I have just what you want," said Colonel McPhister, as he unhooked from his watchchain a small gold sphere. He handed it to Miss Menton.

"What makes it so heavy, Colonel?" she asked.

"There's a bullet inside of it," he replied; "it was inside of me once. When the surgeon cut it out I asked for it. When I got so I could walk to a jeweler's I had it incased in a gold shell. I carry it as a cheerful memento," and the Colonel smiled grimly.

Miss Menton shuddered and turned pale. Ryse thought she was going to faint. "How awful!" she exclaimed; and Wheeler thought to himself, "How tender hearted she is!"

"Now let's begin," said Miss Menton, recovering her spirits, though her face was still pale and a wild excitement burned in her eyes.

"I'm ready," said Wheeler, assuming an air of resignation.

After enjoining silence Miss Menton took a seat

immediately in front of Wheeler. At her direction he placed his left hand in her right. Then with her left hand she held the golden bullet, grasped between the thumb and fore finger, immediately in front of Wheeler and about two inches above his eyes.

"That is one of the simplest ways of producing artificial somnambulism," explained Professor Ryse.

"I must have quiet—perfect quiet," said Miss Menton with mock severity; and then to Wheeler: "Now put your mind in a quiet, receptive condition, and fix your gaze intently upon this little ball."

Wheeler did so. He stared at it with an earnestness that made even Miss Menton smile; Mrs. Mittens tittered audibly, and Colonel McPhister burst into a loud guffaw. This broke the spell. Wheeler laughed outright, and Miss Menton in prettily assumed displeasure declared that she would make no more experiments in the presence of flippant people. "I am confident I could hypnotize Mr. Wheeler if we could be left alone," she said with earnest conviction.

"I've no doubt of it," chuckled McPhister to himself.

"Let's give her a trial," said the Professor.

"She's only a novice and can surely do better if left alone with her subject."

At his suggestion they all retired to an adjoining room, closing the door behind them, and leaving Miss Menton and Wheeler alone. Three minutes had not passed before Miss Menton called, "Come in." McPhister, the Professor, Denman, Montague, Judge Blackwood and the others re-entered the drawing-room. They found Wheeler sitting in the chair precisely as they had left him, except that his eyes were closed.

"He seems to be asleep," said the Professor.

"He's shamming," said Denman, incredulously.

"You may be sure he's not," retorted Miss Menton, sharply. "He is completely hypnotized. I will prove to you that he is absolutely under the influence, and under my control."

She stuck a pin in his arm. Wheeler did not move nor evince the slightest indication of pain. Then she made him laugh, weep, declaim and sing, much to the amusement of all who were assembled, save Judge Blackwood, who regarded these phenomena more seriously.

"Will Mr. Wheeler have any recollection of this when he comes to himself?" he asked of Professor Ryse.

"Not the slightest."

"I will send him to Paris," exclaimed Miss Menton, with a sudden impulse. There was quiet for a moment. "What do you see?" she asked, placing her hand upon Wheeler's head.

The subject's lips moved, but no sound came from them. After a short interval he began to speak slowly and without animation:

"I see a large restaurant. A lady and gentleman are seated at a table. They are talking. Now the gentleman rises and goes over to another table where a dark complexioned man is sitting. There is a quarrel. The gentleman slaps the dark man in the face. The dark man knocks him down."

"What else do you see?"

There was another pause, then Wheeler continued in the same slow manner. "A beautiful woman sits alone and weeps."

"Well, we'll let her weep," said Miss Menton, with a harsh laugh, putting her hands to her temples nervously.

"Now," she said, turning to her astonished guests, "if you will all retire I will bring my subject out of his sleep. You know it will not do to let you see how this is done," she added, with an air of mystery.

The Professor led the way into the next room. Denman was very white and his legs trembled under his weight as he followed the others, but he said nothing. After a few moments had passed, Miss Menton came to the door again and opened it. "Now you can come in," she said, "Mr. Wheeler is himself again."

Wheeler was standing by the mantel examining his face as reflected in the mirror. He looked dazed and sheepish as he turned to the many eyes that were looking at him so quizzically.

"Well, how did I do?" he asked.

"You were a fine subject," said the Judge, "and afforded us much entertainment. I would not have believed so wonderful a thing could be done, had I not seen it with my own eyes."

The others congratulated him, and particularly Miss Menton, upon the success of the experiment. A few moments later, at McPhister's suggestion, Judge Blackwood and himself started to go. The others of the gathering soon followed. Wheeler went down the stairs out into the cool air with Denman, like a man walking in his sleep. He did not seem to have fully recovered from his hypnotic nap.

CHAPTER VII.

"SHE IS A SHE DEVIL."

They walked several blocks in silence. Wheeler was too much engrossed in thought to speak, and Denman was so angry that he dared not trust himself to refer to what had just taken place in Miss Menton's parlors. Wheeler proposed that they stop at a restaurant which they were passing.

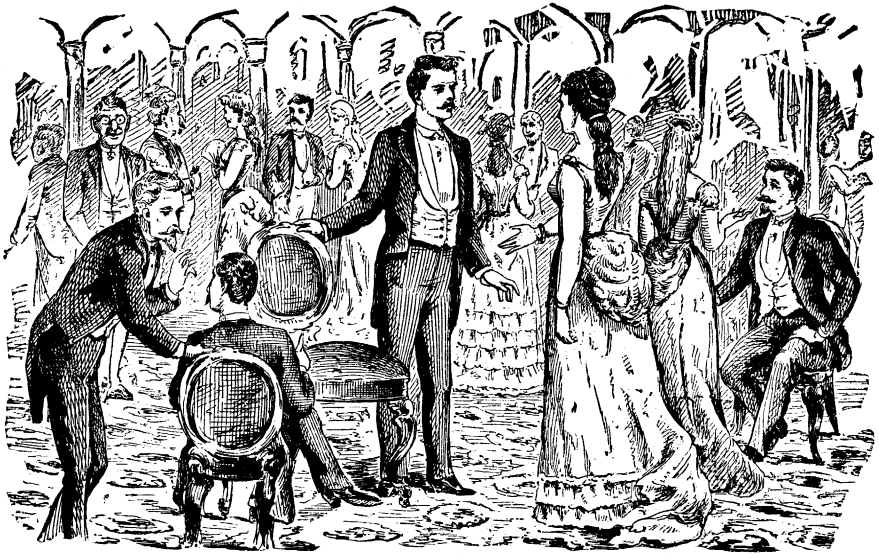
"I think a cup of coffee will do me good," said he; "I feel stupid and heavy."

"I should think you would," remarked Denman with bitter sarcasm.

"What do you mean?" asked Wheeler in surprise. They entered the restaurant and seated themselves at a table.

"After you have given your order I will tell you," replied Denman, shortly. "All I want is a pint of claret and some crackers," said he, turning to the waiter. Wheeler gave his order, and repeated his question. He was hurt by Denman's manner.

"I mean that you have made a fool of yourself,"



IT WAS A SWELL NIGHT AT THE MENTONS.

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said Denman, angrily, "by permitting that woman to put her nonsense into your head."

"But you offered yourself as a subject, too. Where's the difference?"

Denman laughed contemptuously.

"What are you driving at?" said Wheeler, knitting his brows.

"You act your part very well, Wheeler." Denman's voice was bitter, and his manner was insinuatingly insulting. Wheeler was not slow to resent it.

"Do you mean to say that I am not telling you the truth when I say that I'm utterly ignorant of what took place while I was under Miss Menton's influence?" he demanded, rising and looking down at Denman sternly. There was not a trace of color in his cheeks.

Denman saw that he was wrong. "If you give me your word as a gentleman that what you say is true, I accept it, and apologize. But I will tell you what happened. You will then be better able to judge whether I was altogether to blame for suspecting you."

He related all that had taken place while Wheeler was in the hypnotic sleep, repeating, almost word for word, Wheeler's description of the scene in the French café.

Wheeler was amazed and alarmed. "What a dangerous power," he said with an expression of awe. "She must have said those words mentally which I uttered, and conveyed them to my mind in that way. But what could have been her object?"

"To show me that she has not forgotten. Your description brought back that scene very vividly, I assure you. Was it for this she encouraged me to come to her house? Her manner to-night filled me with a strange fear. I shall never set foot in her house again." Denman kept his word.

"I do not blame you for suspecting me," said Wheeler with gentle frankness, all his anger disappearing; "but do not be blue about it. I shall never let her experiment on me again. You may be sure of that. However, I do not think you need fear Miss Menton; she is a very tender-hearted woman."

"She is a she devil," said Denman savagely.

Wheeler did not answer. He saw that his friend was out of sorts and he pitied him. There was a silence between them for a moment. "Let us go home," said Wheeler, rising abruptly.

Denman kept his seat. "Wheeler," said he, moodily, "I think we had better part. That woman exerts a dangerous influence over you. You do not

see her as I do. She hates me, and is sure to break our friendship sooner or later. Why not escape that unpleasantness? Let us go our different ways from this point. You go to your rooms; I will go to a hotel. I feel wretched to-night and want to be alone. I will send for my luggage to-morrow."

"I won't listen to it," interrupted Wheeler.

"But I am determined."

"Well, then, at least do not make me feel that I have driven you from me. Go to-morrow, if you will, but come home with me to-night. I beg you will show me that much consideration. I think it due me, don't you?"

Denman reluctantly consented. They arose and left the restaurant in silence.

"That's a strange pair," said the waiter to the cashier; "quarreling one minute and good friends the next. If I'd 'a been the slender chap I'd 'a never held out to have the other one come and sleep with me if he didn't want to."

But the cashier evinced no interest in the matter, and the waiter strolled leisurely down the hall to attend to the wants of an old gentleman, who had for ten minutes been vainly trying to get somebody to bring him something to eat.

Denman and Wheeler soon reached the latter's quarters.

"Cheer up, old man," said the artist; "I never saw you so down in the mouth before. You'll be all right in the morning."

"I hope so."

They bade each other good night. It was very cordial on Wheeler's part. Each retired to his own room. The little clock on the mantel, with its sweet, far-away-sounding bell, was just striking the hour of twelve.

* * * * * *

It is one of those brilliant nights in November. The moon is at its full. The stars glitter in the steely air, and the earth slumbers peacefully in the pale light. The heavens are glorious in their radiance. They reflect none of the blackness and misery of the great city, whose pulse is not stilled, even in the hour of sleep.

The moon's rays penetrate the room in which Denman sleeps. One can almost distinguish every article in the room — and even beyond, in the studio, the outlines of the furniture can be seen dimly.

The clock on the mantel, with its soft, mellow bell, is sounding the hour of three. The figure of a human being comes out of the darkness and

moves slowly toward the center of the studio. It stands for a moment motionless.

It crosses slowly and softly to the fireplace. It seems to be searching for something on the mantel — no; it is above the mantel, for it reaches up to the collection of arms, which can be seen dimly in the faint light. The hand moves mechanically over the lower part of the heavy shield which forms a center piece — around which the knives, pistols and sabers are arranged — and finally rests on the handle of a poniard. This it removes cautiously and noiselessly. Grasping it tightly in its hand, the figure advances slowly toward the front room. The only sound is the breathing of Denman. His sleep is deep and healthful. Just at this moment he turns from his side and lies full upon his back; but his sleep is not broken

The ghost-like figure continues to approach. Its walk is slow, almost stately. It has entered the front chamber. It pauses an instant. Now it clutches the poniard more tightly and resumes its measured tread across the large room to the bed where Denman lies.

It stoops over the sleeping man. With great deliberation it pulls down the covering, and with its left hand locates the exact position of Denman's

heart; then, with a downward stroke, plunges the poniard into it up to the hilt.

Denman gives a faint gasp, and is dead.

The figure in white relaxes its grasp upon the handle of the poniard, and slowly straightens to an erect position. Its hand is empty. The bright handle of the poniard glistens in the moonlight. Its blade is hidden in the heart of Wheeler's friend. With the same mechanical motion that has characterized its every motion in this silent tragedy, the white form slowly retraces its steps to the rear room, and disappears noiselessly in the darkness.

All is quiet. A murder has been done, without a sound to give evidence of the deed, and without human recognition. The moon is shining. Its rays fall upon the dead body of Paul Denman.

CHAPTER VIII.

"MY GOD! THIS IS AWFUL!"

As Denman was generally a late riser, Wheeler was not surprised when he awoke at nine o'clock to find his friend not yet out of bed. At any other time he would have gone out to breakfast and left Denman to sleep as long as he liked; but knowing that Denman would keep his word, and seek new quarters that day, he felt it incumbent upon himself as host, to be present when the man with whom he was about to part for so strange a reason, should take his leave. So, after he had finished dressing, he called out in a cheery voice: "I say, old man! Isn't it about time you were crawling out?"

There was no answer. Wheeler gave an extra stroke of the brush to his hair, and called again. Still no answer. "He sleeps like a log," he said to himself as he crossed the studio and entered the front chamber. The sight which met his eyes fairly curdled his blood.

Upon the bed, only half covered, lay Paul Denman, dead. His eyes were wide open, set in an

expression of agony. His hands were raised above his head, tightly clasped. The breast of his night shirt was stained with blood, and there was a pool of it on the bed near the left side of the body. Near the stain on the night robe the handle of a dagger stood upright. The blade was buried to the hilt in the heart of the motionless body which lay before Wheeler's terrified gaze.

"My God! This is awful!" he exclaimed, and under an impulse of extreme terror he ran to the window, raised it with frantic haste and cried:

"Murder! Help! — Murder!"

Then he returned to the bed on which Denman lay. A sudden desire to remove the dagger from the bloody wound took possession of him. He leaned over the body of his dead friend; but the instant his hand touched the poniard he recoiled with an undefinable horror.

He stood gazing at the ghastly spectacle, almost helpless. He made an effort to collect his thoughts — to *do* something; but he was like one who has lost his reason.

There were sounds of hurried feet upon the stairs, and a moment later loud knocks upon the door. It occurred to Wheeler then, for the first time, that all the doors were locked. This recalled

him to something like his normal mental condition. He hurriedly unlocked the door. A policeman entered the room, and peered about inquiringly, still holding the knob of the door. A dozen or more persons, who had followed him up the stairs, attempted to squeeze their way in, but the officer drove them back and closed the door.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Matter? Can't you see," said Wheeler pointing to the bed.

"When did this happen?"

Wheeler calmed himself sufficiently to describe briefly how he had risen, dressed, entered the front room to awaken Denman, and found him dead.

"Were all the doors locked?" asked the officer.

"I suppose so," said Wheeler. "This door is always locked. I have not tried the other one, which leads into my studio. That's the one I use, and I'm sure I locked it last night."

He started toward the studio door. "Let me see," said the officer peremptorily. This door was also locked; evidently just as Wheeler had left it the night before.

"There is something mysterious about this," said the officer to himself, casting a suspicious glance at Wheeler.

"Can't we take that knife out?" asked the artist, with a shudder.

"No. I will have the Coroner here in a few moments. Leave the body as it is." The officer leaned over and examined the handle of the dagger.

"Have you ever seen this knife?" turning to Wheeler.

The smell of the blood made Wheeler sick and dizzy, as he bent over the rigid form. "Why!" he exclaimed, rising in surprise, "it belongs to me. Here is its fellow," and he led the officer into the studio to the collection of arms over the mantel. He was right; the poniard on the right of the shield was missing; the other was in its proper place on the left.

"He must have committed suicide," said Wheeler, with conviction. "Poor fellow!"

"Was there any reason why he should?" The policeman asked this as a matter of form. He was not impressed with the suicide theory.

"Perhaps not," said Wheeler thoughtfully, "though he was not in his usual spirits when he retired."

"That will be looked into," said the officer. "I will notify the Coroner at once — I must ask you to come with me."

"I am very faint; I have not had my breakfast yet," explained Wheeler. "I will go and get it and return at once."

"I will go with you." These words, and the officer's manner, suggested to Wheeler the first thought that he would naturally be suspected of the murder of Denman; but he dismissed it as not worthy of serious consideration.

"Very well," said he, with dignity. "Come with me if you wish. It will only take me a few moments."

They left the scene together. The policeman locked the door and put the key in his pocket. On their way to a neighboring restaurant he telephoned for the Coroner. Wheeler was just finishing a chop when the Coroner entered the dining-room.

"Is the corpse here?" he asked with an air which indicated that he was ready for business.

"No, sir; just around the corner. This gentleman," pointing to Wheeler "occupied rooms with the deceased (the policeman spoke as if he were giving his testimony). He was in the room with the body, with the doors locked, when I was called."

Wheeler gave the officer a contemptuous look. To the Coroner he said: "My name is Henry

Wheeler. I'm an artist (the preserver of the peace jumped to the conclusion that he was a song and dance man). The dead man was my friend."

"What was his name?" asked the Coroner.

"Paul Denman."

The Coroner made a note in a small book which he took from his pocket. Then he said: "Come, Mr. Wheeler, let us go at once and get this business off our hands as soon as possible."

Wheeler accompanied the representatives of the law to his rooms. "This is murder," said the Coroner, as he bent over the corpse and examined the position of the body and the expression of the face.

"Might it not have been suicide?" asked Wheeler.

"No." The Coroner spoke with decision. "I'm sure it was not. If he had plunged that knife into his heart himself he never would have removed his hand. He would have retained his grip upon the handle, and you would have found him in that way. Muscular action ceased too soon after the knife entered the heart to have permitted his hand to be removed."

Wheeler was silent. He did not agree with the Coroner; but he did not think it worth while to argue the point over Denman's death.

"Well," said the Coroner briskly, "we may as well take that knife out now," and he leaned over, and with some little difficulty removed the poniard. The blood had congealed around it, and set it firmly in its death sheath. "He has not been dead more than five or six hours," he added. Turning suddenly to Wheeler, he said, "My dear sir, I am compelled to perform an unpleasant duty. I shall have to place you in charge of this officer."

"You can not think I killed my friend," exclaimed Wheeler in horror.

"I have not formed any opinion," replied the man of inquests, with much tact. "You will be suspected; you can see that yourself — indeed, you *are* suspected. It is, therefore, my duty to have you placed under arrest."

"But can I not give bail?"

"That will be for the magistrate to decide." The Coroner wrapped the knife in a piece of paper and put it in his pocket. "Come," he said, "I will go to the Police Judge with you. If he will admit you to bail you will have no further annoyance until the inquest is held. You will have to be there, of course."

"But," expostulated Wheeler, beginning to lose his temper, "you have no right to suspect me. Do

you suppose that if I had committed a murder I would take no precaution to conceal it? Is it reasonable that I would call for an officer to come and find me with the doors locked? Could I not have averted suspicion in a hundred ways?"

"That's all very true, Mr. Wheeler. I'm sorry for you; but you are the victim of circumstances. My advice to you is to keep cool, and get the best lawyer you can find in New York to defend you. It is better for you to come quietly and avoid sensation as much as possible."

Wheeler saw that there was no alternative. He accompanied the Coroner and the officer down the stairs out into the street, past a gaping crowd which had assembled at the door.

They found the recorder in his private office. It did not take long to issue a warrant for the arrest of Henry Wheeler, charging him with the killing of Paul Denman. The Coroner suggested that as Mr. Wheeler was held merely on suspicion, and was prepared to give bonds for his appearance, it would be well to permit him to send for his bondsmen at once. The recorder placed the bail at $20,000, and Wheeler hurriedly wrote and dispatched a note to Mr. Ellersly, a rich merchant who had bought many of his pictures, and whom he regarded as a

patron, to come at once and bring with him another bondsman. Half an hour later, Mr. Ellersly, a bluff, genial-faced old gentleman, appeared accompanied by his partner Mr. Furst. Without a moment's hesitation, after listening to Wheeler's nervously narrated story of the tragedy, they signed a bond for his appearance. Mr. Furst left them at the door, after assuring Wheeler that he would do all that lay in his power to aid him."

"Now you must get a good lawyer" said Mr. Ellersly to Wheeler — "do you know one?"

"No; except by reputation."

"Well, I do" said Mr. Ellersly. "My friend Jack Wright — Jack and I were boys together — is just the man. He is not a criminal lawyer, but he will take an interest in your case, and do you more good than any professed criminal lawyer could. Do you know, if I were charged with a crime, and was innocent of it, I would get a lawyer who had never figured in the criminal courts, but who had the confidence of judges; but if I were guilty, I would retain a criminal lawyer as soon as possible — the more criminal the better. Now as you are innocent it is plain you don't want a criminal lawyer; but one like Jack Wright."

The old gentleman's hearty manner was a tonic

to Wheeler. He grasped Mr. Ellersly's hand and thanked him as only a man who is in desperate straits can thank the one who brings succor and hope. Mr. Ellersly called a cab. They entered it, and were driven to the office of John C. Wright, Esq.

Lawyer Wright was about the age of Mr. Ellersly, say sixty. His face was grand in its strength of will and character. Thoughtful gray eyes looked straight at you from beneath a broad projecting brow. Here was a man on whom a weak brother might lean with full confidence in his strength and honor. When he had heard Wheeler's story, recited in exact detail, he asked, kindly but very seriously: "Have you told me all," Mr. Wheeler.

"Everything."

"You do not think it possible for a person to have entered the room at night, by other means than the door?"

"No — unless by the window."

"That's not likely. Is there anything which could be construed into a cause that would warrant the suspicion that you had committed this crime — anything that could be made to appear as a motive?"

Wheeler thought a moment. "No," he answered "I can think of nothing."

"Return to-morrow, and we will go deeper into the case" said Mr. Wright. "I have other business that must be disposed of at once. But you may trust me not to forget you. You shall have my best efforts, for the sake of my old friend" and he gazed affectionately upon Mr. Ellersly, who grasped his hand warmly, and said, "Always the same, old Jack."

Mr. Ellersly insisted that Wheeler should accompany him to his home. "Returning to your rooms is out of the question" he said. "It would unsettle your nerves — and they are in a pretty bad condition already. You need all the strength you have. Come and make your home with me until this thing's all over." There were grateful tears in Wheeler's eyes, as he re-entered the carriage with his big-hearted patron.

CHAPTER IX.

"BUT IT IS RETRIBUTION! — RETRIBUTION!"

Miss Menton stood at the window and looked down into the street. She had been restless all day. The excitement of the night before had brought on a nervous headache. She had tried to read, but even the latest French novel failed to interest her. The servants were surprised to see her rise from the table leaving her breakfast almost untouched; and she had eaten very sparingly at lunch. It was an unusual thing for Miss Menton to be without appetite. Even her father noticed it.

"What is the matter?" he had asked.

"Nothing. I will be all right by evening," she had answered, as she abruptly left the dining-room.

Turning from the window, Miss Menton rang for a servant. "Go out and buy me an evening paper," she said. The girl soon returned.

"There's bad news in that paper, Miss!" she said, excitedly, as she placed a copy of *The Telegram* in Miss Menton's lap.

"What is it?"



PLUNGES THE PONIARD INTO HIS HEART UP TO THE HILT.

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Miss Menton looked up suddenly, and with interest. Any kind of news was welcome if it would drive away the *ennui* from which she was suffering.

"Mr. Denman has been murdered, and Mr. Wheeler has been arrested," replied the servant, breathlessly. "It's awful, ain't it, Miss?"

Miss Menton turned deathly pale, put her hand to her heart convulsively, and sank back in her chair. Thinking she had fainted, the girl started to leave the room to call old Mr. Menton.

"Never mind," said Miss Menton, recovering herself with an effort. "I am better now. It was a great shock to me. You may go, Mary."

"She was awfully fond of one of them," said Mary to the cook, to whom she hastened to tell the news which she had read in *The Telegram*, before giving it to Miss Menton, "but I can't tell which. I think it's Mr. Wheeler, though." The cook and Mary settled themselves comfortably for a long talk. They had not had so exciting a subject for conversation for a long time.

Miss Menton opened the paper with trembling fingers. Under flaming head lines she found this sensational account of the mysterious death of Paul Denman. It did credit to the reporter who wrote it, considering that he had devoted only two hours

of his legs and brains to the collection and the embellishment of the facts (?):

Paul Denman and Henry Wheeler occupied rooms together on Sixth avenue, near Thirty-fourth street. Denman was a man of leisure, having, it is understood, an assured income. Wheeler is well-known in artistic circles. He is said to be an artist of promise, and has exhibited several paintings at the Academy. He is also a frequent contributor to the magazines. These men were apparently friends.

As Officer Sullivan was passing the house this morning, at about nine o'clock, he heard a cry of "Murder! Help!" He looked up and saw a man standing at an open window. This man was Wheeler. It was he who had cried for help. Officer Sullivan hurried promptly to the scene. To his surprise he found the door of the room locked. He demanded admittance. After a short delay the door was opened. The officer found Mr. Denman lying dead upon the bed with a knife in his heart. His suspicions were at once aroused. He believed that a foul murder had been committed. Wheeler pretended to be very much grieved at the death of his friend. He said he had found him dead upon rising a few moments before, but he could give no satisfactory explanation of how the crime could

have been committed by anybody but himself. He tried at first to make the Coroner — who was summoned by Officer Sullivan — believe that Mr. Denman had died by his own hand, but the Coroner did not accept that theory. He had Wheeler arrested. The prisoner furnished bonds at the Jefferson Market Police Court. The reporter tried to find him to get his statement, but was unable to do so, the alleged murderer disappearing very mysteriously after leaving the police court.

The evidence against him thus far is circumstantial; but it so strong that Officer Sullivan thinks there is not the slightest doubt of his guilt. He devoted the entire morning to working up the case, and he has discovered what he believes to be a valuable clue. A waiter in a restaurant on Sixth avenue, about six blocks from the house in which the murder was committed, tells a story which connects Wheeler very closely with the crime. His name is John Snyder. He is on what is called the "night watch" in the restaurant in question. He begins work at noon and stops at two o'clock the next morning. This morning he was on his way down town — "taking an airing" — as he expressed it to the officer, before going to work. It so happened that he was passing the house where Wheeler and the murdered

man lived just as Wheeler was brought out by the Coroner and Officer Sullivan. He says he recognized him at once as one of the two men who had been in the restaurant in which he (the waiter) is employed, on the night before. These men had high words, and one of them rose to his feet, as if about to strike the other. Snyder says that Wheeler was this man. He went on to tell Officer Sullivan that the quarrel seemed to have been amicably settled, and that the man whom he recognizes in Wheeler, begged the other to go home with him — if only for that night. He seemed to be particularly anxious, so Snyder says, that his companion should go home with him. Upon hearing this story Officer Sullivan took the waiter to the morgue and showed him Denman's body. Without hesitation Snyder pronounced it to be that of the man with whom Wheeler had had the quarrel in the restaurant the night before.

This would seem to establish a motive for the crime, though it is not yet known what the quarrel was about. Certain it is, however, that Snyder's testimony will aid the authorities to unravel the mystery. The Coroner says Denman had not been dead more than seven hours when he was called. The date of the inquest has not yet been set.

Miss Menton gazed vacantly before her. The

paper had fallen from her hands. She seemed dazed — unable to comprehend the full meaning of what she had read. She heaved a profound sigh. "Poor Wheeler," she murmured, and an expression of true pity softened her face.

"But it is a retribution — retribution!" she added hysterically, and she staggered out of the room.

CHAPTER X.

"I CALL GOD TO WITNESS THAT I DID NOT KILL PAUL DENMAN."

Mr. Ellersly insisted on going to lawyer Wright's office with Wheeler, when the latter started down town to keep his appointment. The old gentleman's heart went out to the young artist in his suffering.

"You need a friend, my boy, and I intend to devote myself to you until this bad business is ended," said he. "I am convinced of your innocence, and it will help others to believe in it if the world sees that your friends stand by you."

"Yes; but can we make the world believe it?" Wheeler asked, moodily.

He had passed a sleepless night. His face was pale and worn, and there were dark circles beneath his eyes. The strain was beginning to tell on him already. The more he thought of the situation in which circumstances had placed him, the clearer it became that it would be difficult to prove his innocence. After reading the statement of the waiter,

Snyder, in the morning papers, he had been filled with a sudden fear. He had entirely forgotten the incident in the restaurant. It came back to him now with startling force. He saw that its bearing upon the case would be magnified by those who were disposed to believe him guilty. So depressed was he that he felt that only a miracle could save him. He tried to formulate a theory to explain Denman's death by other means than suicide, but he failed at the very start. Denman had no enemies — at least, none that he knew of; and besides, even if an enemy had desired his death, how could it have been accomplished? Were not all the doors locked, and every means of entrance barred? It was possible, of course, for the murderer to have entered by the aid of a pass key, but that was not likely. In despair he turned to his first impression, that Denman had died by his own hand; but even that theory seemed weaker to him than it had the day before. Leaving out of consideration the Coroner's presumption — that if Denman had stabbed himself death would have followed so suddenly that he would not have had the strength or will to remove his hand from the poniard — Wheeler could not entirely convince himself that Denman would have

had the moral courage to end his own life. Still, there was no other way to solve the mystery.

"Come, come," said Mr. Ellersly, cheerily; "keep up your courage. Jack Wright will get us out of this; you may depend upon it."

"I hope so," said Wheeler, in a voice indicative of anything but hope.

They had reached the lawyer's office. Mr. Wright was waiting for them — or rather, for Wheeler. He seemed surprised to see Mr. Ellersly. The latter noticed it. "You'll see a good deal of me, Jack," he said; "more than you have seen for years. I intend to stay right with this matter until you have brought my young friend out all right."

The lawyer's face wore an unusually grave expression.

"I would like to talk with Mr. Wheeler privately, if you will kindly leave us alone for a few moments, Ellersly," he said. "We have serious business on hand, and there must be no misunderstanding at the start."

"He, too, suspects me," said Wheeler to himself, bitterly.

"Do you want me to go out, Henry?" The old man spoke with the solicitude of a father.

"No, no," replied Wheeler, with feeling "I

have nothing to hide from you; and I want to lay my whole heart bare to Mr. Wright."

"That's well spoken," said the lawyer. "Now we shall know what we are about. To begin with, explain to me the story of the waiter, which is printed in all the papers this morning. I was dumfounded when I saw it; for it does not accord with the assurance you gave me yesterday, that there was nothing which could be construed as a motive to connect you with the crime. Tell me all about it."

"I had forgotten the circumstance," said Wheeler, and he spoke with a sincerity that carried conviction. "The waiter has exaggerated. There was no serious quarrel. It was over in a moment."

"What was the cause?"

"We had spent the evening at the house of Miss Menton — a kind of general resort for men about town. The Mentons are scientific people — that is, the old man is a scientist, and his daughter, who lives alone with him, has naturally taken some interest in his studies. We had an experiment in hypnotism. I was the subject. I permitted myself to be put under the hypnotic influence by Miss Menton, who caused me to describe a certain scene which took place several years ago in Paris, in

which both she and Mr. Denman had figured. This made Mr. Denman angry. At the restaurant he suggested that we part company at once. He knew Miss Menton was his enemy, and he believed she had sufficient influence over me to break our friendship in time. He finally consented to return to my rooms that night. That was all."

"Why did this Miss Menton hate Denman?" asked the lawyer.

"Must I tell you? I pledged my word to Denman that I would never disclose his secret."

"Your life is in danger, Mr. Wheeler; if that secret has the slightest bearing on this quarrel, it is your duty to make it known. I insist upon knowing it."

Wheeler hesitated a moment, and then without reserve told Denman's story. The lawyer followed its recital closely. "A very strange case!" he muttered.

"Do you love this woman — Miss Menton?" he asked abruptly.

Wheeler flushed. "I admire her very much," he admitted.

"Were you ever in love with her?"

"Seriously? No."

Mr. Ellersly had listened with wonder to Wheel-

er's statement. "How in the world did you ever get into such company?" he asked, shaking his head reprovingly.

"They are not such bad people," explained Wheeler, quickly. "They are very clever, and I liked to visit them because there is nothing conventional about their house."

"It's always wiser for a man to be conventional, even if he does find it dull," put in the lawyer, dryly. "Many a man, and woman too, has got into trouble by trying to ignore the rules which govern society."

"I can see that very plainly now," said poor Wheeler, dejectedly.

There was a moment's silence, broken by Mr. Wright, who said: "The line of the State's prosecution which we must meet, is quite clear to me. It will be alleged that you were in love with this woman; that Denman came between, and you grew jealous; that after the quarrel in the restaurant you seemingly forgave him, and urged him to come to your rooms. Why? Simply that you might kill him."

Wheeler almost groaned aloud. Dark as was the picture his fears had drawn, it was not so black as this.

"What can I do?" He asked the question hopelessly.

"Mr. Wheeler," said lawyer Wright, "look me squarely in the face. As you expect your life to be spared in this world, and forgiveness in the next, tell me the truth. Did you kill Paul Denman?"

Wheeler rose to his feet, raised his right hand involuntarily, and with a voice choked with the emotions which swelled his bosom, said: "I call God to witness that I did not kill Paul Denman. A murderous thought never entered my heart."

He tottered to his seat, and wept like an hysterical woman. "This is unmanly, I know," he said, attempting to calm himself. "But I can't help it. All is dark before me. I feel like a man at the bottom of a deep pit, groping around for an outlet, and fearing every moment to fall into an awful abyss. My mind is a chaos of a thousand vague thoughts chasing one another in mad confusion. I fear I shall go mad." The wretched man arose and paced the floor in a nervous excitement painful to witness.

"He has a highly nervous temperament," said Mr. Ellersly to Mr. Wright, by way of explanation. "I have always known that."

"Poor fellow!" and the lawyer arose and

placing his hand on Wheeler's shoulder, said: "I believe you are innocent, and I will use my heart and brain and soul to make a jury believe so."

"God bless you!" said Mr. Ellersly wiping a tear from his eye.

This confidence and sympathy made a man again of Wheeler. It was what he had craved. He began to show an interest in his case.

"What defense will you make?" he asked.

The lawyer did not answer at once. After a moment's thought he said: "I can't tell until after the inquest. I don't know what evidence they will produce."

Wheeler and Mr. Ellersly took their leave, the former in better spirits, and with a faint hope that lawyer Wright would be able to clear him with honor.

No new facts were developed by the inquest. The Coroner courteously permitted Mr. Wright to be present and to cross-examine Snyder the waiter, who finally admitted that the quarrel between Wheeler and Denman was not a serious one. He said he could not tell what the quarrel was about, because he only heard a word now and then; he judged the men were quarreling from Wheeler's actions. The result of the inquest was as Mr.

Wright had supposed; Wheeler was held to await the action of the grand jury, which, it is needless to say, found a true bill against him.

Wheeler had come to regard Mr. Ellersly's house as his home. He remained there until the trial took place three weeks later, going nowhere except to lawyer Wright's office. Mr. Wright had prepared the only defense that could reasonably be made. He purposed to show that the relations between the men were really friendly, and to deny that the testimony of Snyder was sufficient to warrant even the suspicion that Denman had died by Wheeler's hand; but had in a moment of despondency committed suicide.

"That ought to clear me," said Wheeler, when Mr. Wright told him his plan. "There can be no doubt that Denman committed suicide."

"I have very grave doubts," said the lawyer seriously; "but it is the only defense we can make. The truth is, circumstances are very much against us."

Wheeler's hopes fell again. "If that's the case I'm afraid the jury will take the worst view of it."

The lawyer made no reply. He was afraid so, too.

CHAPTER XI.

HER HAND RELAXED ITS HOLD UPON THE RAILING, AND SHE FELL FROM THE WITNESS CHAIR.

On the day of the beginning of the trial of Henry Wheeler, charged with the killing of Paul Denman, the court room was well filled with spectators. The Denman murder was still the sensation of a great city where sensations are the daily product of the police courts. Up to this time the newspaper reporters had not been able to discover that there was really a woman in the case, though several of them in their speculative articles on the mystery had hinted at it, on general principles. However, the peculiarity of the crime in itself was sufficient to hold public interest.

When Wheeler entered the court room and took a seat by the side of his lawyer there was a buzz of whispering voices. The sentiment of the spectators was that he did not look like a murderer. He was very pale, very thin, and his once erect form was slightly stooped. He had suffered during that short month more than a man of harder nature could

have suffered in a year. He had been despondent ever since Mr. Wright had so frankly told him that the chances were against him.

A fine, drizzling rain was falling without. Wheeler regarded this as a bad omen; and when he looked up to the bench and saw Judge Blackwood there, his heart sank within him. His mind went back to that memorable night in the Menton house. Not one of the guests who were present that night had come to offer their sympathy — yes, one had; Colonel McPhister, and he had done it with a heartiness characteristic to the man. "The Judge will be like the others," Wheeler thought. "He will believe that I was in love with that woman, and jealous of Denman."

The day was consumed in getting a jury — and an exceptional jury it was, composed of sensible business men and intelligent mechanics.

"If we can't get justice from that jury," remarked lawyer Wright to Mr. Ellersly, "we may as well give up."

Mr. Wright's purpose was to gain as much time as possible, and he improved every opportunity that offered itself to delay the trial. He was not without hope that something would turn up that could be used to the advantage of his client. He was fearful



A POLICEMAN ENTERED THE ROOM, AND PEERED ABOUT INQUIRINGLY.

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that he could not make the suicide theory sufficiently strong to overcome the circumstantial evidence which the prosecution would offer.

The next day the examination of witnesses was begun. Officer Sullivan testified to the discovery of the body, to the fact that the door of the room in which the dead man lay was locked when he arrived, and he swore that Wheeler seemed to be dazed and frightened. The Coroner related the conversation which he had with Wheeler; and the physician who made the autopsy satisfied the jury that a man could not live long with a knife in his heart, and that, consequently, Denman had died almost instantly. It was his opinion that Denman had not been dead more than ten hours when he first saw the body, which was at 1 o'clock on the afternoon of the discovery of the crime.

Snyder, the waiter, told a straight story of the quarrel in the restaurant. It was evident that he was honest, and Mr. Wright's cross-examination did not materially weaken the testimony he had given.

Something of a sensation was created when the clerk called the name of Miss Helene Menton. It was the first intimation the audience had received that there was a woman in the case; and when it saw that there *was* a woman, and a handsome one as

well, its interest increased one hundred per cent. Miss Menton came forward and took the stand.

"How old are you, Miss Menton?" Question by the District Attorney.

"Thirty." The answer came in a clear, melodious voice.

"Do you know the defendant?"

"Yes." It was little more than a whisper.

"Your Honor," interrupted Mr. Wright, "I must ask that the witness remove her veil. I do not think Miss Menton will object," he added politely.

Before the Judge could speak Miss Menton had removed her veil, disclosing a face deadly white. Its strange beauty captivated jury and audience at once. The examination was continued.

"Miss Menton, how long have you known the defendant?"

"More than a year."

"Did you know the deceased?"

"Yes."

"How long?"

"About a month."

Mr. Wright hastily scribbled a memorandum on the foolscap before him.

"What were the relations between the defendant and the deceased, so far as you could discover?"

"Apparently friendly."

The District Attorney seemed to be disappointed in the answer. He continued:

"Did the defendant ever express an opinion of the deceased to you?"

"Once, I think. He said that Mr. Denman was a strange fellow; that there were some things in his character that he liked, and many that he did not."

"Miss Menton, did not the defendant regard himself as your lover?"

"I'm sure I can not say," replied the witness, with perfect self-possession, and without change of countenance.

"Did he not make offer of his love to you?"

"Not exactly."

"Did he never, in all the time you knew him, say anything which led you to believe that he loved you?"

"I don't know how to answer that," said Miss Menton with a faint smile.

"Answer in your own way," said the District Attorney encouragingly. Miss Menton after a moment's hesitation replied:

"Once he intimated that he entertained a warmer

feeling than friendship for me. I think that was all."

"Did he not in many ways show that he thought more of you than of other women?"

"Perhaps so; your question is difficult to answer."

"Was not Mr. Wheeler jealous of you?"

"Not that I know of."

"Did he have any reason to suppose that Denman, the deceased, was his rival?"

"No." It came very sharp and bitter.

"Might he not have imagined that he had some cause to believe so?"

"I object to that question," said Mr. Wright. "He's got no business to ask the witness what she thinks some one else thought."

The objection was sustained.

"Then I will put it in another form," said the District Attorney, determined to carry his point. "Was there, or had there ever been, anything between you and the deceased, which the defendant could have construed into a cause for jealousy?"

"I refuse to answer that question," said Miss Menton coolly. The jurors opened their eyes very wide, and there was quite a stir in the audience.

"The question is a proper one," said the Judge; "the witness will please answer it."

Miss Menton was defiant for a moment, then she answered, apparently with great frankness:

"I can truthfully say there was never anything between Mr. Denman and myself that could have made Mr. Wheeler jealous."

The District Attorney did not press that point further.

"The defendant and the deceased were both guests at your house on the night before the murder, were they not?" he continued.

"Yes," answered the witness, with a slight tremor in her voice.

"What took place at your house that night?"

"We had some experiments in hypnotism," replied Miss Menton, making a perceptible effort to appear at her ease.

"Well, what was done?"

"Mr. Wheeler was hypnotized."

"By whom?"

"By me."

"What do you expect to show by this rambling examination," interrupted Mr. Wright.

"You'll find out soon enough. Just be patient," replied the District Attorney sarcastically. He went on with the examination:

"Did Mr. Wheeler do anything on that night which led you to believe he disliked the deceased?"

"No."

"Did he do anything at which the deceased could have taken offense?"

"Mr. Denman seemed to have taken some offense at something Mr. Wheeler said."

"Said when?"

"When he was hypnotized."

"What was it?"

"I don't know; nothing that appeared to me to be a cause for offense. He may have been angry because Mr. Wheeler consented to make the experiment."

"I shall show before I get through, Your Honor, that the quarrel in the restaurant was on this very point." Having thus delivered himself, of his intentions, the District Attorney announced that he had no more questions to ask the witness.

Mr. Wright began his cross-examination. Miss Menton had not made a bad witness — that is, she had not done much injury to Wheeler's case. It would seem to have been politic for Mr. Wright not to press her further, but he could not afford to lose a possible trick in this game of life and death.

"Miss Menton," he began, "you say you knew

Mr. Denman about a month. Are you not mistaken?"

Miss Menton clutched the railing nervously, as she answered in a low voice:

"No."

"Let your mind go back five years, and see if you can not recall a meeting with the deceased before you met him in New York two months ago?"

"No." The voice was still lower, and she pressed her hand to her heart. Mr. Wright followed up his advantage. He asked in a stern voice, which was very effective:

"Didn't you meet him in Paris five years ago, and haven't you good cause to remember that meeting? Answer my question."

But the witness was in no condition to answer questions. Her hand relaxed its hold upon the railing, and she fell from the witness chair in a swoon. Her father, who had occupied a seat near by, rushed to her side and raised her in his arms.

"My daughter has been very ill for some days," said the old man, addressing the Court. She is suffering from a nervous affection which I fear is likely to end her life at any moment. The excitement has been too much for her."

A carriage was summoned, and Miss Menton, still unconscious, was placed in it and hastily conveyed to her home. As it was then late in the afternoon, the trial was adjourned to the next day.

Mr. Wright rubbed his hands with satisfaction as he entered his office accompanied by Wheeler and Mr. Ellersly. "I don't know what advantage I can put this to," he said, "but it's something to have got the best of it on the first day. We've got the sympathy of the jury to-day. We'll try hard to keep it, and we may yet be able to upset this motive theory."

But Wheeler could not see it in that light. He feared that all the facts, if they were brought out, would make the alleged motive stronger than ever.

That night, while Mr. Wright was in his library at home, busily at work upon a theory that Denman had committed suicide through remorse for the killing of Miss Menton's lover — a theory which he purposed to have Miss Menton aid by her testimony, a servant brought him a letter. To his surprise it was from Lucius Menton; but its contents were even more surprising. It read:

"Come to my house at once. My daughter is very ill — dying, I fear. She insists upon seeing you, and Mr. Ellersly."

Without stopping to speculate upon the object of Miss Menton's desire to see him, but feeling intuitively that it had some important bearing upon Wheeler's case, Mr. Wright ordered a cab and drove rapidly to Mr. Ellersly's house. That good old soul was in bed, but it did not take him long to dress himself. He entered the cab with the lawyer, and soon they were at the door of the Mentons. They were shown at once to the room where Miss Menton lay. The ugly face of Dr. Grip met them at the door.

"She is very low; she can not live much longer," he said as he passed out of the door, leaving them alone in the room with the dying woman.

A moment later Mr. Wright re-entered the drawing room, where Dr. Grip and Menton were quietly discussing the efficacy of a new anæsthetic.

"I must have a stenographer at once," he said with only half suppressed excitement. "There is no time to lose."

Dr. Grip volunteered his services as a messenger. At Mr. Wright's suggestion he took the cab in which the lawyer and Mr. Ellersly had come, and which was still standing at the door, and drove to the house of Mr. Wright's managing clerk, who was soon ready to return with him.

Upon arriving at the Menton house they found Mr. Wright awaiting their return with anxiety. He hurried the stenographer into the sick room. The door closed behind them.

Two hours later it opened, and Mr. Wright, Mr. Ellersly, and the clerk re-entered the drawing room. Lucius Menton was not inquisitive. He asked them no questions, and the trio entered their cab and drove away.

Dr. Grip hastened at once to Miss Menton's bedside. "She seems calmer," he said to Mr. Menton who had followed him into the room, "but she is very much weaker. Death may come at any moment."

As lawyer Wright let himself into his house with his latch-key he said to himself: "This wonderful story may be true — I believe it is, but can I ever make a jury believe it?"

CHAPTER XII.

"THANK GOD THERE IS LIGHT AHEAD."

Johnson, Mr. Wright's clerk and stenographer, did not sleep that night. The December sun peeped in through the window and found him still at his desk. His busy pen did not rest until it had covered a score or more sheets of close lined legal cap. The poor fellow was tired out, but he appreciated the importance of the task, and he did not grumble. Johnson was a representative of a large class: Trustworthy, loyal to his employer, and always willing. How rare it is that one of these over-worked, under-paid clerks, to whom matters of great import are entrusted, proves false or recreant! And how rare it is that their loyalty is appreciated and rewarded!

Mr. Wright made his appearance an hour earlier than usual that morning, and Mr. Ellersly and Wheeler entered the office only a few moments behind him.

"What is this hurry and excitement?" asked

Wheeler. "Mr. Ellersly is very mysterious. He will not enlighten me. Is there new hope?"

"Yes; let that satisfy you, for I have no time to talk now," he answered. "We have a month's work to do in a day, and we can't waste a moment."

Piqued at the abruptness of Mr. Wright's reply, Wheeler took a seat near the window, and tried to interest himself in the morning paper. He had grown indifferent. He did not care much how the case might end.

Court would not open for an hour; and Mr. Wright improved every moment of the intervening time. On the way down town he had stopped at the residence of Dr. Gray, his family physician, and left word for him to come to his office as early as possible; and the doctor put in an appearance shortly after the arrival of Wheeler and Ellersly. Wright had a hurried consultation with him in his private office. As they came out, and Dr. Gray prepared to go, he turned to Mr. Wright and said:

"You may depend upon me. It will not be so difficult as you thought. Fortunately Nurgson, the celebrated physiologist of Paris, who has made this subject a special study, is now in New York. I can get you half a dozen other scientific men who will give their testimony, and be glad of the opportunity."

"We must have them to-morrow," said Mr. Wright.

"Do not fear; they will be on hand, I promise you." And the doctor hurried away.

"Have you completed that document, Johnson?" asked Mr. Wright.

The clerk replied that it was all ready for him, but that he would like to compare it with his notes again. Johnson was a very careful clerk.

All this hub-bub and mysterious conversation awoke Wheeler from his apathy. He knew that something must have happened to affect his case favorably, but what it was he could not surmise. However, he had grown to have such complete confidence in Mr. Wright that he was quite willing to leave the case entirely in the lawyer's hands. Besides, he had grown weary of speculating upon the mystery of Denman's death. He had believed from the first that his friend had died by his own hand, and no matter how he might reason and theorize he always returned to that conclusion. He could not understand how any man who knew him could for a moment doubt his innocence.

"Come, Mr. Wheeler; it is time to go." The brisk voice of Mr. Wright startled Wheeler from his reverie.

The crier was opening the session when they entered the court room. The attendance was larger than it had been on any previous day of the trial. The newspaper accounts of the testimony of Miss Menton, and the dramatic climax which her falling from the witness stand in a swoon had caused, had created a new interest in the trial; and applicants for admission were so numerous that one could hardly squeeze into the space between the doors and the railings.

When the jury had entered the box, and the trial had been formally resumed, Mr. Wright arose and in a grave voice and impressive manner, said:

"I beg the Court to adjourn this trial for a day. New evidence — evidence which affects my client very closely, which proves his innocence has been discovered. I will present it to the Court to-morrow, together with the testimony of several witnesses, for whom I shall ask the Court to issue subpœnas to-day."

"What is your new evidence?" sneeringly asked the District Attorney. "Could you tell us now?"

"I could, but I will not," answered Mr. Wright curtly.

"The Court will grant the adjournment if you can show good cause," said the Judge.

"I have no wish nor reason to conceal the evidence which I purpose to introduce," replied Mr. Wright. "And I am willing that the gentleman who seems determined to have my client punished, guilty or not guilty, shall have full opportunity to investigate its source, and overcome it if he can."

"Proceed," said the Court.

"I purpose to show," continued Mr. Wright, speaking with a force and earnestness which commanded the attention and respect of every one in the room, "that my client has been the victim of a strange plot — and as foul as it is strange. I shall show that it was his hand that drove the dagger into the heart of Paul Denman, but that he is not responsible — neither to God nor to the law for ——"

"I protest," cried Wheeler, with startling vehemence, jumping to his feet and raising his hand to the Judge. "I have been deceived. Whatever Mr. Wright may mean by this I shall not consent to it, for it is false. I kill Paul Denman! I a murderer! It's a lie! I will not submit!"

Wheeler was beside himself with excitement. His eyes dilated and his whole frame shook with emotion. The District Attorney smiled, and looked at the jury out of the corners of his eyes as much

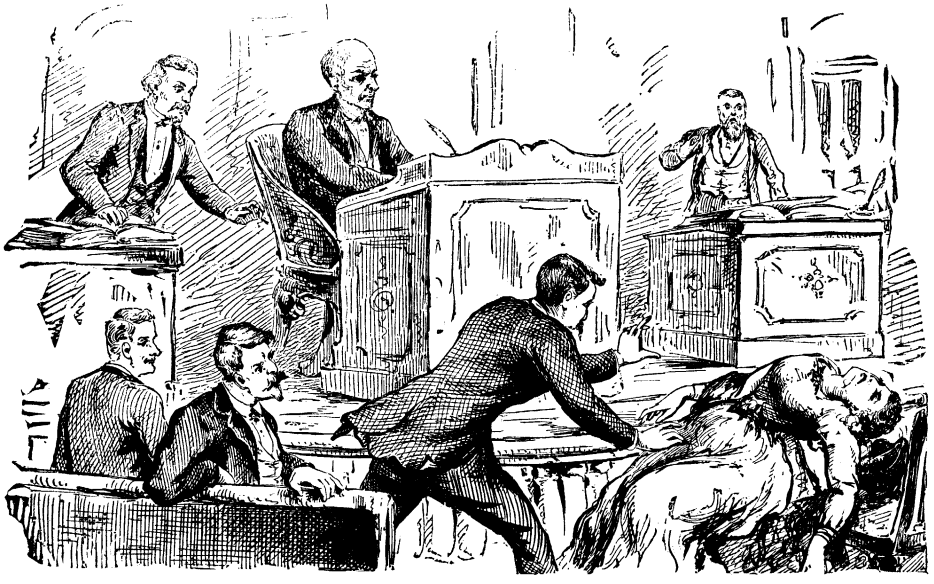
as to say: "What do you think of this business now?"

A quiet satisfaction beamed in Mr. Wright's eye for a moment. Then turning to Wheeler he said, kindly: "You may trust me, Mr. Wheeler. Sit down and compose yourself." Wheeler resumed his seat in a maze of bewilderment.

"It's all right, Henry," said Mr. Ellersly, leaning over and whispering in his ear.

"I shall show," continued Mr. Wright, after quiet had been restored, "that my client committed this act while in a hypnotized condition, the scientific explanation and proof of which will be furnished in due time. This condition was produced in him by the witness who gave her testimony yesterday, and who fainted on the stand — Miss Helene Menton. I have her dying statement to that effect — a statement which no court can refuse to receive. The poor creature may be dead now; at the best she can last only a few hours."

It was almost impossible to preserve order in the court room. Men and women began talking aloud, and the commotion finally became so great that it was necessary for the bailiff to assert his muscular power as well as his official authority to restore quiet.



HER HAND RELAXED AND SHE FELL FROM THE WITNESS CHAIR.

See page 118.

The District Attorney was on his feet in an instant.

"This is without precedent —"

"That's true," assented Mr. Wright, parenthetically.

"I say it is without precedent," repeated the District Attorney, waving his arms like a windmill. "Here comes an attorney and asks for delay that he may present evidence to prove that his client is guilty — to which the client very naturally objects. And what kind of testimony is it? Why it's as ridiculous on its face as an old woman's ghost story. I hope Your Honor will not grant an adjournment."

"But the Court will," said Judge Blackwood, with a promptness and decision that almost took the District Attorney's breath away. "It will not do," he continued, gravely, "to scoff at things we can not understand, especially when there is a life at stake," and the adjournment was granted.

Wheeler was so weak and nervous when he reached Mr. Wright's office that he begged permission to go into the private room and lie down. Mr. Wright's explanation to the Court, in which he had shown that Miss Menton had caused him to do a murder, had unmanned him. He dared not think

of it, and yet the lawyer's words echoed and re-echoed through his brain.

"Now do you see why I did not want to tell Wheeler?" said lawyer Wright to Mr. Ellersly when they were alone. "I knew that a man of his impulsive, nervous nature would be quite certain to act just as he did when the secret was revealed. We can never make him believe that he committed that murder, and that very fact strengthens our case with the court and jury. To-morrow I will read the confession."

"Thank God there's light ahead," said Mr. Ellersly, fervently. "But poor Wheeler! It will blight his life."

"That's where you are mistaken," answered Mr. Wright. "It will not blight his life a whit more than it will mine."

CHAPTER XIII.

A BURNING DESIRE FOR REVENGE UPON THE MAN WHO HAD ROBBED ME OF MY LOVE.

When the Denman murder trial was resumed on the following day there were half a dozen scholarly-looking men occupying seats within the railing. "Those are the experts," said a *quid nunc* in the audience, and those who heard him looked at the scientific gentlemen with much the same interest they would have exhibited in viewing a collection of Bengal tigers.

When Mr. Wright arose and began to unfold a roll of manuscript the audience held its breath, for the promised confession, the strangest of all confessions ever known in the annals of crime of the great city of New York, was about to be read.

"This," said Mr. Wright, "is the statement of Helene Menton, made *in articulo mortis* on the twelfth day of December of this year — the day before yesterday. The unhappy woman since that time has gone before that higher Court where all may hope for mercy. Let us hope that she may

receive it. She died at 12 o'clock last night." Mr. Wright continued: "The confession reads thus:

"'Believing death to be at hand, I, Helene Menton, as an act of justice to an innocent man, and in the hope of forgiveness through this act, solemnly declare that I am morally guilty of the murder of Paul Denman. That the world may not judge me too harshly let me relate the story of my life: — I will tell why I was moved to be revenged upon the man who robbed me of happiness and honor, when they were almost within my grasp, after long years of misery and neglect. I was born in Paris on the 30th of June, 1856. My mother, who, at the time of her marriage was a dancer of some renown in the theatrical world of Paris, died when I was five years old, leaving me to my father's care. Even my earliest recollections are sorrowful and bitter. I craved affection but could not find it. My father was cold in his nature. I saw but little of him, as most of his time was devoted to his studies. When I was eight years old I went with him to India. We spent three years there. I was left to the care of nurses most of that time. My father had a craze to solve the mysteries of occultism. It never occurred to him that the nature of his child was

worthy of investigation. From India we went to England. Russia soon offered attractions to him. So it was, up to my twentieth year we were constantly journeying from one country to another. His associates were mostly scientific men. It made no difference what a man's moral character was; so long as he was a scholar my father's house was always open to him. I grew to womanhood in an atmosphere of cynicism, selfishness and materialism. I never knew a truly good woman in my life. I have never known the refining influence of home. My surroundings have been without sentiment, without love, and without a tinge of moral color.

"'And yet the woman's heart within me did not wither in this unhealthy atmosphere. I had vague longings for a life that was not cold, hard and selfish. I believed that I deserved a kinder fate. My hopes seemed about to be realized when Paul Denman thrust himself into my life. We had been living in Paris about five years. Those five years had been full of misery to me. It would have been better for me had I left my father's house and sought refuge in a convent. Once I thought of doing so; but my father had destroyed my faith in religion, by his cold and logical arguments, and I turned back to the old life without hope.

"'The society which I met at our house in Paris — I could not call it home — was gradually killing what little sentiment and tenderness there was left in me, when I met the Count Ludwig. He was brought to our house by one of my father's friends — a German. He was the first man I had ever met since I had become old enough to understand human motives who seemed to have an honest respect for me. He talked to me of those things of which I had so often thought in my lonely misery — of home life, of his mother, and once I found myself weeping as I listened to his description of the beauty and goodness of his sisters, and the happiness of one of them in her preparations for her approaching marriage to a man she loved and respected. These were the first tears I had shed since childhood. My grief deeply moved the Count. His sympathy was sweet to me and I poured out to him the story of my unhappy life. "Poor child!" said he, and he took my hand and pressed it kindly. From that moment I loved him with a love that women who have had affection all their lives could not understand. I worshipped him.

"'He became a constant visitor at our house. I held myself aloof as much as possible from the

others who came almost nightly. My father put no restraints upon his guests. They played at cards, drank till late into the night, and came and went as they pleased. This was my father's idea of hospitality. It amused him to see men get drunk, and he would laugh heartily when they lost their money at cards. He never joined them at the gaming table. My love for the Count ennobled my aspirations, and I hated my surroundings with a bitterness stronger than ever. To my great joy I soon discovered that my affection for the Count was reciprocated. The bliss of the moment when he took me in his arms and kissed me — the first kiss a lover ever imprinted upon my lips — comes back to me now, and I am happy, even in these my dying moments. I was to be his wife, an honored wife — and a Countess. I will not deny that the position I would secure in society by marrying Ludwig increased my desire to become his wife, and influenced me almost equally with my love for him, in naming an early day for the wedding.

"'I was to get out of the meshes which had held me all my life. I was to live among good people, to be respected — a Countess. Women who have never known what it is to be without the respect of the world — to be unknown and neglected — can not

appreciate how great was the joy which possessed me when I saw the way opened to an honored place in in society. I was to have been married to the Count in December — five years ago. In November Paul Denman was brought to our house by a young art student — a forward young man who had called only once or twice before. Denman was one of the coarsest men I had ever met. He did not have even the superficial refinement of the professional *roué*. He presumed that because it was not difficult to be introduced at our house, and because of the unconventionality of the life we led, that I was entitled to little better treatment than the shameless women of the streets. I directed the servants not to admit him if he should call again. He came on the following night. The servants carried out my commands, and he turned from the door, cursing me and every one in the house. I think he was drunk that night as well as the night before.

"'A few nights later, on returning from the opera with the Count, happy in his society and in the prospect of our approaching marriage, we stopped at a *café*, as was our custom after the play or opera. This man Denman occupied a seat at a table near where we sat. I had not told Ludwig of the insult he had offered me. I dared not. Denman seemed

bent upon showing me that he despised me. He stared at me so contemptuously and insultingly that Ludwig noticed it, and before I could entreat him not to pay any attention to him he had crossed to where Denman sat. They quarreled. Ludwig was the smaller man of the two, and Denman, the coward, took advantage of his physical power; he knocked him down. The Count challenged him. I begged him not to fight with so low, so base a man, but I could not change his purpose. I prayed that night for the first time since my childhood. I might have known that such prayers as I could offer would not be answered; I had no right to expect it.

" 'I never looked upon the face of Ludwig again. He fell by the hand of a man his inferior in courage, in honor, and in manliness. Perhaps it was his fate. My father had a passing interest in my grief. He searched all Paris for Denman, but could not find a trace of him. Two years later we came to New York. My father was born here, but was educated abroad, and had no love for his native country. We live here very much as we did in Paris, though my father's associates in New York are of a better class, morally, than those who gathered around him there. I had drifted back into the old life. If anything I grew harder, more

indifferent than ever, without hope of happiness, but with a burning desire for revenge upon the man who had robbed me of my love, and cheated me of a place among good women. Can I be blamed? What else was there for me to live for?

"'I was leading this miserable existence when Mr. Wheeler — who, next to the Count, I admired more than any one I had ever met — brought Denman to our house. He did not know whom he was to meet. He trembled under the glance I gave him. His conscience made a coward of him. From that moment I devoted my every thought to devising some means of revenge. Nothing but his life would satisfy me. I encouraged him to return. I knew his weakness, and seemingly lowered myself to the level on which he had placed me. I had not yet thought of a way of wreaking my revenge. I had only one desire; that was, to kill him. I believe it would have resulted in my doing the deed with my own hand had not a novel means presented itself. The method which I used suggested itself to me after a conversation I had with Prof. Ryse. He described to me how the investigations of hypnotism had been carried to such an extent in Paris as to prove beyond a doubt that an impression could be conveyed to a person, while in the

hypnotic state, which could be re-awakened at any time that might be determined upon by the operator. He showed me the report of a case in which a man who had been hypnotized had been directed by the person who hypnotized him one week from that day and hour, to take off his shoes and stockings and walk barefooted for a hundred yards. The experiment was a success. The Professor pointed out the danger of the abuse of this strange power — a murder might be done by its aid, he said.

" 'My mind acted quickly. I decided to try this powerful agent, with which I was familiar in a general way. I never thought of Mr. Wheeler as a subject until he himself suggested it in a playful way. I can not comprehend how I consented to make *him* a partner to my crime. The opportunity suggested itself sooner than I had expected. On the night of the 6th of November there were a number of guests at our house; among them Paul Denman, Mr. Wheeler, Dr. Grip, Mr. Landis, Colonel McPhister, and his friend Judge Blackwood. The conversation turned upon psychology, and Prof. Ryse, who has made hypnotism the subject of thoughtful study and investigation, began to

describe the advancement which had been made in it.

"'I felt guilty even in the contemplation of the act, and was fearful that Professor Ryse would go on to say that it was possible for a murder to be done through its power — as he had suggested to me.

"'I was not unfamiliar with the method of producing the hypnotic trance. I would have known how to do it without Professor Ryse's directions. To every one in the room but myself the hypnotising of Mr. Wheeler was a pleasing experiment — nothing more. My first attempt failed. I had not intended that it should succeed. It was my purpose to be alone with Mr. Wheeler. I succeeded in getting the other members of the company to leave the room. Mr. Wheeler was perfectly willing to be hypnotized. He suspected nothing, feared nothing.

"'I could not have found a better subject. In a very few moments he had, by following my directions and gazing fixedly at the small object I held in my hand — a golden bullet — prophetic instrument, which I had borrowed from Colonel McPhister — passed into the hypnotic state. It was

then that I called the guests in. I caused Mr. Wheeler to do a few of the things which are in the alphabet of hypnotism. I could not resist the temptation to mentally describe the scene at the *café* in Paris, which led to the loss of my lover, the blasting of my hopes — and to this crime. Mr. Wheeler repeated the words aloud. I could see that it struck fear to Denman's heart, and I enjoyed it with a savage satisfaction.

"'I was in doubt as to whether I could convey an impression to Mr. Wheeler mentally that would be active after I should arouse him from his trance. So, pretending that there was a great deal of mystery connected with the process of bringing him out of the sleep, which I did not care to explain, I asked the company to leave the room. They did so. It was in the moment that they were absent that I repeated aloud, and with all the impressiveness I could assume, these words: "At three o'clock, get a knife and plunge it into Paul Denman's heart." I said these words three times. Poor Mr. Wheeler repeated them after me, as innocently as he would have repeated a prayer. Then I awoke him from his trance, and the party dispersed. Suddenly, the thought entered my mind that it was impossible for

Wheeler to carry out my directions, because he would doubtless be asleep at that hour. I had never heard that an impression could be retained and put in execution if the subject were in a natural sleep at the time when that impression should suggest itself to the mind. This doubt brought with it the hope that my wicked plan would fail. I began then to realize how awful it was to make a murderer of this innocent man who trusted me. The deed was done as I had ordered it: it was done at the hour I had named, as the autopsy proves. Henry Wheeler is as innocent of the crime as a babe unborn. I am the murderess, as much so as if I had with my own hand driven the dagger into Paul Denman's heart. The persons whose names I have mentioned in this, my dying confession, who were present when I hypnotized Mr. Wheeler, will attest the truth of my statement as to what took place at my house. I am about to die. I am not sorry that Denman was murdered. I feel that the only crime I committed was in making Mr. Wheeler the instrument. By the friendship he once professed for me I beg his forgiveness. I was heartbroken and desperate when the means was placed in my hands to destroy the man who had, without cause,

robbed my life of the only hope and happiness it had ever known, and I could not resist the temptation to employ it. I die; glad to quit a world which has been so hard to me. Henry Wheeler is no more responsible for the death of Paul Denman than is the inanimate knife which penetrated that bad heart.'"

CHAPTER XIV.

"NOT GUILTY."

During the reading of the dying confession of Helene Menton, the voice of Mr. Wright was the only sound that broke the stillness of the court room. It created a profound sensation, not only among the spectators, but among the jurymen.

Mr. Wright proceeded to prove by Mr. Ellersly and Johnson the correctness of the document which he had just read, after which Prof. Ryse was called, and the taking of what has come to be called "expert" testimony was begun. Prof. Ryse first described what had taken place at the Menton house on the night of the murder, corroborating the testimony of Miss Menton in every detail, so far as it related to what was done in the presence of the guests.

"You are sure that Mr. Wheeler was hypnotized by Miss Menton, are you?" asked Mr. Wright.

"There is no doubt of it."

"Do you believe it possible for an impression to have been conveyed to him while he was in the hyp-

notized state that would impel him to commit an act after he should be brought out of that state?"

"Yes."

"Do you think it possible for this crime to have been committed as set forth in Miss Menton's confession?"

"Yes."

"Please tell the jury something of the general characteristics of the hypnotic power."

"Hypnotism," began Professor Ryse, "is not yet thoroughly understood. The uses to which it may be put are more numerous than even the most advanced scientific men dreamed of five years ago. The hypnotic condition, as nearly as it can be defined, is almost a counterpart of somnambulism. It is a well established fact that the sleep-walker has absolutely no remembrance in his waking moments of what he has done in his somnambulistic tours. It is so in hypnotism. It has been proved, by frequent experiments, that a man may be hypnotized on a certain day and have a train of thought awakened in his mind by the operator, and then be suddenly restored to his normal condition. A week later, say, the same man is again put into the hypnotic trance. It is quite likely that he will at once take up the subject which the operator had

suggested to his mind when he was in the same condition a week before, and continue it until the operator directs his thoughts into other channels. It has been proved, too, that the operator may convey impressions to his subjects, which, under a command given to the subject at the same time, will emerge from the registering ganglia of the brain at a day and hour, even weeks distant, and be as potent as if the subject were still in the hypnotic sleep before the operator."

"What kind of memory would you call that?" asked Mr. Wright.

"That can only be conjectured. Some writers claim that it is purely cerebral memory. There can be no doubt that the spinal cord may be educated to perform the functions of cerebral memory. I believe that actors have unconsciously cultivated medullary memory. By its aid they are enabled to repeat lines of a part without conscious volition. However, wherever the place of retention of an impression may be, there can be no question but that it *is* retained. I see no reason to doubt that the crime was committed through the hypnotic power, in view of the statement of the operator."

The celebrated Nurgson, the French physiologist, could not give his testimony in English, and

it was with some difficulty that the court interpreter made clear some of his technical phrases. He began by describing the immediate effect of the hypnotic influence. Said he:

"The first step is to put the subject into a profound sleep — a state of complete unconsciousness. His mind is a blank. He has no thoughts save those which are suggested to him by the operator. He is as if in a dreamless sleep; dead, for the time. As I have said, mental activity is awakened only by the operator. In the ordinary biological condition the subject has his eyes open and seems to know what is taking place; but in the complete hypnotic trance his eyes are almost invariably closed. He seems to be in a torpor. His bodily movements are slow, and his mind, even under the immediate direction of the operator works laboriously. There is an appearance of stupidity about him.

"Some subjects are more susceptible than others, though nine persons in ten may be hypnotized. The chief requisite is a willingness to submit to the influence. The subject must be in a state of mental abstraction; from that state he passes by imperceptible stages into the hypnotic condition. He becomes, as has been well expressed

by an English writer, a mere statue of attention, a listening, expectant life; a perfectly undistracted faculty. While in this expectant condition, anything that is suggested to the subject is magnified; joy is doubly joyful; fear is doubly fearful. Every sense is exalted. The subject's whole being, his entire sensibility seems to live in each faculty of perception, as it is aroused to action. Even his physical strength is increased; his muscles will stand a strain that would lacerate them if he were in his normal condition. Men who are incapable of lifting a hundred pounds can be made to lift twice that weight. Persons have been known to perform feats while under the hypnotic influence which they would not dare even attempt in their usual state.

"Hypnotism is really an artificial sleep. What takes place during the time that a person is in that sleep may be likened to the dreams that one has in his natural sleep of which he has no recollection — unconscious cerebration. There is nothing supernatural about it. There can be no doubt that it is a dangerous power. Properly used, however, it may be made of incalculable benefit to mankind. Patients on whom operations were to be performed have been hypnotized and the operation done with-

out pain to them and without their knowledge. It is the most powerful of all anæsthetics, and altogether harmless in its effects. Its value in medicine is just beginning to be understood. Just before I left Paris an experiment was made in the *Salpetriere* Hospital, which was more wonderful than the exhibition of the power of hypnotism which this case affords. A woman who had been hypnotized was placed in a chair on one side of a screen; a dumb woman suffering from hysteria was seated on the other side. A large magnet was placed near the hypnotized dumb woman, and by its aid a magnetic current was established between the two women. Speech was almost instantly restored to the dumb patient; and the other, when awakened from the hypnotic condition, was dumb. She was unable to utter a sound for several hours, but in a very short time recovered the full use of her organ of speech."

"But do you believe that an impression conveyed as you have described, could be put in execution while the subject was in his natural sleep?" asked the District Attorney.

"It is not impossible."

"Have you ever known of such an instance?"

M. Nurgson admitted he had not. He added:

"No man can say to what extent hypnotism may be carried. It is one of the most powerful agents mankind possesses. The world is only awakening to its uses."

"If murders are to be done by its aid it is better that the world continue in ignorance, I think," remarked the District Attorney.

Other scientific gentlemen were called. They all testified to the admitted existence of the hypnotic power, and in various ways described its attendant phenomena. They asserted their belief in the possibility of the commission of a crime by a hypnotic subject at the command of a wicked operator.

The District Attorney had no testimony to offer. He had not been able to find a scientific man in New York who was willing to go upon the stand and deny the existence of the hypnotic power, or the possibility that a crime might not be committed by its agency. Thus the trial of Henry Wheeler was brought to a close, so far as the taking of testimony was concerned.

The District Attorney knew that he had lost his case; he read it in the faces of the jury, in the manner of the Judge, and there could be no doubt in his mind as to where the sympathy of the spec-

tators lay. His argument was brief. He showed that it had been proved that Wheeler was found in the room with the body of the murdered man, and with the doors locked; that there had been a quarrel between the prisoner and the deceased on the night before the crime was committed, and that there was presumptive evidence of the existence of jealousy on Wheeler's part, creating a sufficient motive for the crime. He sat down, feeling that he had done his duty.

"I leave the case of my client as it stands," said Mr. Wright. "The dying words of Helene Menton, and the testimony of these eminent men, versed in the science of the mind have, I believe, convinced the jury that Henry Wheeler is not responsible to his God, nor to the law, for the commission of this act. The scientific gentlemen, who have described this strange power, have told you so. If they can not be believed in a matter of this nature, who can? If they do not know, who does?"

In charging the jury Judge Blackwood felt it to be his duty to lay particular stress upon the importance of the "expert" testimony. "We live in a progressive age," he said, "and it will not do to set aside those things which our minds can not at first fully grasp. My name is mentioned in the

confession of Helene Menton. It is true that I was present at her house on the night before Paul Denman came to his death. I feel it to be my duty as a Judge, irregular as it may seem, to assure you that on that night I saw indisputable evidence of this strange power. Now, if you believe that Helene Menton told the truth in her dying words, it will be right for you to accept the testimony of the scientific gentlemen who have explained the known extent of this power, and acquit the prisoner at the bar."

"Thank God for a Judge who is not afraid to aid justice," said Mr. Wright to himself.

The jury retired. It had been absent not more than ten minutes when a tipstaff announced that it was ready to report. The jurymen filed in and took their places.

"Have you agreed upon a verdict?" asked the Judge.

"We have," responded the foreman. He handed a slip of paper to the Clerk who read, aloud:

"Not guilty."

A cheer went up from the audience. No attempt was made to restore order. Wheeler was hurried away by Mr. Wright and Mr. Ellersly. Seated in

the lawyer's office, Mr. Ellersly said with pride, as he glanced at Wright:

"Didn't I tell you, Wheeler, my boy, that Jack would get you out of your troubles?"

"To him and that noble woman I owe my life," replied Wheeler with feeling.

"What noble woman?" asked Mr. Ellersly in surprise.

"Miss Menton, of course. It was a grand sacrifice; only a noble woman could have made it."

"What are you talking about?" said Mr. Ellersly sharply. "If this noble woman had not died as she did you would have been hanged. There was no sacrifice about it. Most people confess their crimes before they die."

"You are mistaken in your opinion of Miss Menton," replied Wheeler calmly. "She had committed no crime. I believe she made that statement to save my life, not because it was true. I am as sure in my heart of that as I am that I did not commit a murder."

"Who did then?" asked Mr. Ellersly, beginning to fear that his friend had gone daft.

"Denman died by his own hand." Wheeler seemed to be annoyed that Mr. Ellersly should believe that Denman had been murdered.

CHAPTER XV.

"THINK OF THE AWFUL VENGEANCE SHE WREAKED THROUGH YOU."

The Menton house was closed — indeed, it was the Menton house no longer. With its beautiful hostess cold in a new-made grave, with the wonderful laboratory of Julius Menton denuded of its furnaces and retorts, and their owner over the seas in Paris, ending his degenerate days in selfish oblivion, it suggested only a memory of the days agone. But the drawing room in which Miss Menton had held her *salons* seemed to retain the old atmosphere.

When Julius Menton advertised the sale of his furniture, Henry Wheeler hastened to buy it; and when old Menton moved out Wheeler moved in, much to the surprise of his friends, who thought he should be the last man in the world to take up his abode there. Mr. Ellersly protested vehemently. He could not comprehend how Wheeler could voluntarily surround himself with the associations which lingered around the place.

"You might as well go to an insane asylum at

once," he said. "The memories of this place will drive you mad."

"They will be sweet memories to me," Wheeler answered, simply.

And so they were. He placed his easel in the old drawing room, and his working hours were spent there. He believed he could feel the presence of the woman who had spent so many sad and bitter moments within its walls. The only grief he had was for the loss of her society. In his dreamy moods he could imagine himself listening again to her voice, and he could see the outlines of her superb form. He erected a monument over her grave, and revered her memory with a tenderness that was almost hallowed. At times, his friends feared that the shadow which had fallen upon his life had unsettled his mind, and yet there was nothing in his manner to indicate that he was unhappy. Though more thoughtful than of old, yet he was as frank and cheerful as ever. He was not in need of their sympathy.

He rarely thought of Denman, and when he did it was without tenderness. The friendship which had once existed between them was not perpetuated in memory. He sometimes felt that he owed it to

Miss Menton to despise the man who had caused her so much misery.

He painted as he had never painted before, and he wrote with a new virility. His character seemed to be more stable, his individuality more intense. He made a name for himself. Perhaps his strange history had something to do with bringing him into prominence, for anything or anybody who is unlike anything or anybody else is quite sure of attention from the world these days. However that may be, Wheeler had more commissions than he could fill. Thus he had entered a new life. The mystery of Paul Denman's death had been a turning point in his career.

One day, five years after the trial, Mr. Ellersly, still hale and genial, though whiter of beard and hair, sat in Wheeler's studio, watching with interest the development of a picture under the artist's brush. They had sat for some moments in silence. Mr. Ellersly looked long and thoughtfully at a life-size, half-length painting in oil which hung upon the wall immediately opposite the artist's stool. It was an idealized portrait of Miss Menton — a truly wonderful work in its poetic treatment.

"Henry," asked Mr. Ellersly, suddenly, "why do you have that picture hanging constantly before

you?" nodding toward the portrait. "Doesn't it give you the blue devils when you look at her, and think of the awful vengeance she wreaked through you?"

"Why should it?" asked Wheeler, turning from his work, seriously but with evident irritation.

"Of course it should not," replied Mr. Ellersly, quickly and apologetically, "for you are not responsible for the act; but doesn't it call up unpleasant memories?"

"My dear Mr. Ellersly," said Wheeler, "I can never forget the kindness you have shown me, nor the true friendship and aid you gave me when I most needed sympathy and help. But I must beg of you not to speak of this matter as if it was I who killed Paul Denman. The thought is repulsive to me and equally as absurd. I have never talked with you on this subject — that is, I have never told you what I believe, what I *know*.

"Let us admit to start with that Miss Menton despised Denman. It is possible that in the bitterness of feeling which the wrongs he had done her engendered, she may have attempted to take her revenge in the way she described in her confession. This may be possible; but I do not believe it. She would never have made me a party — even an inno-

cent one to a crime — to a murder. However, admit that she did intend that I should do a murder. Does it follow that I did it? Not at all. If she had directed me to fly across the East River I believe those experts would have sworn that it was not impossible for me to have done it. The theory on which I was cleared of the charge of killing Paul Denman was ridiculous. I am very sorry that Miss Menton's confession was ever introduced. It placed me in an awkward position. I could have been cleared by showing that Denman killed himself. We were all frightened at the time. For myself I know that it was impossible to think clearly. But I can see it all very plainly now.

"Wright should have shown that there was no motive to connect me with the crime; that there was absolutely no reason why I should have killed Denman. We were not rivals, and I was never jealous of him, simply annoyed, at first, because I could not learn what the relation had been between Denman and Miss Menton in Paris. The fact that I was discovered in the room with the doors locked conld have been used to my advantage, for a murderer does not give the alarm to notify the world of his crime, and call in witnesses to prove that he is the guilty man. The whole theory is wrong.

"I am convinced that Denman died by his own hand. There was no murder about it. He was morbid and full of strange fears that night, as he himself confessed to me. Probably remorse so preyed upon his mind as to suggest the ending of a useless life. The jury could have been made to see this. Wright's theory and his experts were unnecessary. If I committed that crime, don't you believe that in all the years that have passed some sudden thought would have come to me — some re-awakened impression that would bring back the deed to my mind? There would be a something that would tell me that it was really I who killed Paul Denman. I have never had such a thought — never the vaguest kind of impression. On the contrary, my belief that Denman committed suicide grows stronger every day. I am a reasonable man; I am in health; my brain is not affected, and I can understand a proposition as clearly as most men. Therefore I refuse to believe that I could commit a murder under any influence and not know it. A thousand experts could not make me think otherwise. I shall believe as I do now to my dying day."

And he did.

THE END.